

THE
GIFT
OF
THE
GODS

PEARL FOLEY

of Presbyterian



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

THE GIFT OF THE GODS

THE GIFT OF THE GODS

BY
PEARL FOLEY

TORONTO
THOMAS ALLEN

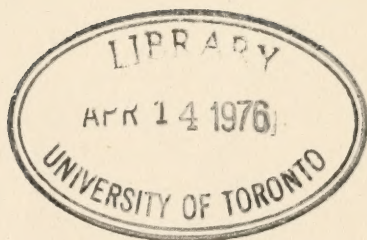
Copyright, 1921,

By Pearl Foley

—
All rights reserved
—

Made in U. S. A.

PS
8511
034 G-54
1921



TO MY MOTHER

THE GIFT OF THE GODS

CHAPTER I

“It’s ripping fun, Uncle Weng.” The words trilled out gaily, and the girl paused in the act of batting an oncoming ball. “That’s a foul, Lun. Try again.” Her bat was poised easily and this time met the ball squarely, sending it in a straight, clean spin far into a distant thicket. “My word, Betty, that’s a home run for you.”

Weng Toy looked about puzzled. “Where are the other players, Autumn Gladness? Did my approach banish them?”

“Lun is one side and I’m the other. The rest are make-believes. We saw them playing the game yesterday at the Americans’ on the opposite hill. They call it baseball.”

“Indeed? And you like the Christian game?”

“I like the *foreign* game,” corrected the girl, a teasing reprimand in her voice. She had dropped her bat, and now crossed to the bench, where the man was seated. Sinking into a graceful attitude at his feet, she looked up at him with wide, serious eyes.

“Uncle Weng, why do you hate the foreigners? The American girls on the opposite hill are so

pretty. They laugh and run and dance. Yesterday I coaxed Lun to stand and watch them, and one girl came up and asked us in."

"Did you go?" There was an easily detected anxiety in the man's voice.

"No, no, of course not, without your permission; but if they ask me in to-day, may I?"

The girl's voice was wistful.

Weng Toy looked down at the eager young face. Placing his hand under her chin, he questioned, "Are you growing dissatisfied with your old uncle's company, little Tu Hee?"

A quick, protesting shake was the answer, and the girl caught his hand, pressing it against her cheek. "You know that could never, never be, Uncle Weng. How could I be anything but happy, when you are so good to me? It's a wonder I'm not a stuck-up prig, the way you spoil me. But these girls, Uncle Weng, they look as happy as I. It is true they are perhaps a little boisterous, but when I hear them laugh and see them run and jump, little quivery thrills run all through me and I want to do the same. I could, too," she exclaimed, springing nimbly to her feet. "Poor things, they wear skirts — American skirts." She looked down with considerable satisfaction at her own silken trousers. Then with a gay laugh she darted away, disappearing like a nymph among the flowering bushes.

Tu Hee, or Autumn Gladness, had imbibed the subtle charm of her native hills of China. The

cream of her skin, relieved by tonches of rouge and daintily painted lips, gave her the appearance of a radiant tropical bud promising to unfold wondrous beauty. Her naturally arched brows were penciled into a fine line, while masses of black hair crowned her an oriental princess. Hoops of lustrous pearls shone softly from her ears and seemed to enhance the youth and mystery of her. Trousers and a loose coat of finest embroidered silk were the final clamps of the Old World on this maiden of the East. There was one part of her, however, which all the arts and incense offerings could not prevail on to blend with the oriental colouring. It was her eyes. They retained the deep, smiling blue of the skies.

Light as thistledown, she sped along the blossom-bordered path and threw herself, panting a little, on the bank of a large pool which barred her way. Two large willows drooped languidly over the water, casting it half in shade, and in and out of its shadow-flecked depths darted fantailed gold fish. Musingly Tu Hee trailed her gold nail shields in the water. Her reverie was of short duration, however. With a graceful bound she was on her feet again. Deftly she unbound the heavy braids of her hair, letting them fall in two long plaits over her shoulders. Gathering a handful of white blossoms from a tree beside her, she twined them over her ears and down the long, shining braids. Then, bending over the pool, she surveyed herself appreciatively in the watery

mirror. Claspings her hands on the back of her head she swayed back like a graceful willow and smiled up at the white puffs sailing so airily across the blue of the sky. Then, spreading her arms like a bird its wings, she abandoned herself to the joy of mere living. Her small, satin-shod feet gleamed in and out among the flower beds. Her heart supplied the rhythm, and so perfect was the attunement that she forgot she was paying homage to life in a foreign way—forgot she was betraying her Chinese training.

She saw as in a mist her uncle and Lun approaching, but she could not stop. Her heart was too light to harbor even pity. Neither the rebuke in the mandarin's eyes nor the horror in her nurse's fascinated gaze touched her. The youth within her had called and she had had to obey. So she danced on and on until she fluttered, a breathless heap, at Weng Toy's feet. It was only then the enormity of her offense rushed over her. Claspings her hands she dropped her head lower and lower until her forehead touched the mossy ground. A quiver shook her as she wondered if the Evil Eye had cast a spell on her while she gazed at the foreigners at play.

“Raise your head, Autumn Gladness. Do you not trust your Uncle Weng to know that youth and happiness cannot be curbed? Why that droop of shame in your eyes?”

Tu Hee looked up and her eyes were wide and

questioning. "You think it not evil then to adopt so quickly the American play?"

"Youth mimics youth. Fret not yourself, child."

Gently he lifted her to her feet, but he could not banish the shadow that rested on her face. As they walked back to the house, where tea was ready on the verandah, Tu Hee was silent. She was musing over the strange rapture that for a few moments had changed her whole personality. She had no longer been the Gift of the Gods while she danced.

The fact confronted her, emphatic and undeniable, that during those brief moments she had been transported—nay, perverted—into a hated foreigner with alien emotions stirring every fibre of her being. What penalty should she exact from herself that would be sufficiently harsh? Incense-offering seemed a poor unguent for offended conscience. She would keep away from the foreign home on the neighboring hill for a month. Even as she resolved she was startled at the proportions her sacrifice assumed.

CHAPTER II

TU HEE kept her self-imposed promise faithfully. For five weeks her outings were in an opposite direction to the Americans. To-day, however, a social function compelled her to pass the shunned place. She had demurred at going, but Weng Toy insisted that she must not exile herself. He wanted her to be happy and gay and not mope around the house like a love-sick maiden, and Tu Hee shrank from telling him her true reason. She could not pain him by confessing what a magnet the foreigners still were to her.

Conflicting emotions crowded on her as Lun prepared her for Madam Hoy's function. When the last gold button was fastened and Lun pushed her in front of the long mirror to survey the loveliness that glowed from the mauve silk gown, her heart beat rapidly and her feet tilted, impatient to be out and away, her own carefree self again.

"Of course I shall enjoy Madam Hoy's party," confided Tu Hee to her nurse and maid, "but what I should like most of all would be a ride on a pony—not a meek little beast either, but one with an arch to his neck and fire in his eye."

Lun paused in the act of placing the big jade pin in her mistress' hair and peered wonderingly into

her face. "But Missee Tu Hee never ride pony—mule maybe, but pony, no."

"Ah, but I've seen other girls ride them. And Lun"—here she dropped her voice, but her tones were emphatic—"I've envied the foreigners riding them, especially the English girls. They look so—so *chic*."

"Cheek—cheeken—cheeken is fowl, Missee Tu Hee. Tee hee—my, my—you very funny! Just what Lun thinks—ungraceful, bad mannerly—just like cackling hens."

"No, no," laughed Tu Hee. "You do not understand. That word is French. It means smart and attractive looking."

"So?—h'm." It was evident that for once Lun openly disagreed with her child. Then, a lurking doubt in her tones, which she evidently wished to have banished at once, she questioned, "Missee Tu Hee happier than foreigners, eh?"

"I suppose." But Lun fancied the tone of her mistress lacked decision.

"Missee Tu Hee marry rich mandarin—have sons and happy right here in China. No go away or do like foreigners to make happy, eh?"

"Lun!" Tu Hee grasped the woman's hand. Her eyes were wide, and her face looked pale despite its make-up. "Who says I marry mandarin? Not Uncle Weng? No, no, I couldn't bear it."

"No, no." Lun was soundly frightened at her indiscretion, and hastened to reassure her mis-

tress. "Only Lun say so. It not be if Missee Tu Hee say no. Course not." Lun patted the little hand she held, and her voice was so reassuring that Tu Hee grew calm again almost immediately, but her voice was a trifle sharp as she admonished, "Please, then, Lun, don't say such foolish things again." Then noticing the hurt look on the other's face she placed her arms around her and exclaimed impulsively, "I am happy with just you and Uncle Weng. I want no husband — unless —"

"Yes?" prompted the Chinese woman.

The girl's heavy lashes drooped shyly — "I fall in love."

Tu Hee peered happily from between the curtains of their rickshaw on the way to Madam Hoy's. The life of the thoroughfares never ceased to interest her.

There stood the old man in his customary corner dishing up ears of boiled green corn. A little farther along, surrounded by a group of children, was the candy man, delighting them by his deftness in turning out animals and birds, which formed mysteriously as he blew taffy from a straw.

An old beggar, ragged and dirty, prostrated himself as he saw the oncoming rickshaw, and Tu Hee tossed him a few cash as they sped past.

"We shall pass the Americans'. I wonder if they will stop us to-day," Tu Hee mused aloud, but there was an eager thrill in her voice.

“ You like be friends with foreigners ? ” questioned Lun.

Tu Hee did not answer at once. When she spoke her voice was hesitating. “ They sort of fascinate me, Lun. They show their teeth so often — smile I mean, and look so friendly and beaming at you. Then again they appall me by their shamelessness. Just think of it, not a vestige of paint to cover their naked faces ! ”

“ Ah see, is it not wonderful ? ” Tu Hee pointed in delight at the beauty they were in the midst of. The busy streets had been left behind, and they were now being borne swiftly up a narrow path on the hillside. Gurgling streams tumbled over moss and stone and then ran on, disappearing in the cool mysterious shadows ; flowers, the colors of which would have rivalled a rainbow, were everywhere ; and the sun wrapped all in a warm, golden embrace, like a mother guarding her children into youth and happiness. The path grew wider, and finally merged into a road which stretched broad and fairly smooth into the thoroughfare on the other side.

The rickshaw came to a sudden halt. The women inside gave the incident not even a passing thought. Did it not occur whenever the carriers shifted the weight of the equipage to another shoulder ? But when sufficient time for the process had elapsed and their vehicle still remained stationary, Tu Hee became impatient.

“Lazy boys, what keeps you?” she called, putting her head out of the enclosure.

Cautious whisperings came to her: “What is it, Tzu? Why the delay?”

Tzu for reply glanced at the other carriers and they at him and then each at the other. When the circuit was completed their gaze shifted up the road. Tu Hee’s eyes took the same direction and she saw that a large automobile, a touring car, was blocking the way.

“Ah, a breakdown. Some foreigners have had trouble with their car.” A little pleasurable thrill was in her voice again and her eyes glowed with the sparkle of adventure. Then, her glance returning to the carriers, she demanded a little impatiently, “Why stand there, foolish ones? Why not offer your assistance? It’s not likely they will permit you to climb with us over the car. Go and see what is the matter and—” But here Tu Hee perceived she was talking to deaf ears. Her indignation, however, gave place to curiosity and her heart beat quickly, whether from fear or excitement she couldn’t have told, perhaps a little of both. But which ever it was she forgot to withdraw her head, forgot what had been drilled into her from babyhood—that it wasn’t meet for a Chinese maiden to show her face boldly to the opposite sex. The men who were approaching in long strides were foreign, too—American, Tu Hee decided. A mere glance betokened that.

They took no notice whatever of the three ser-

vants, but approached Tu Hee. The girl was too startled at this bold effrontery to withdraw. Instead, she gazed at them with wide, indignant eyes. They looked at Tu Hee severely, and the taller and younger of the two raised the lapel of his coat, displaying a badge. Tu Hee's education had not been neglected. Instead, it had been well rounded out. Weng Toy had made as much of a confidant of her, and taken as much pride in the development of her mind, as if she had been an adopted son, so she quickly recognized that the men confronting her had to do with Government affairs. Her training bade her withdraw her face at once, but her curiosity induced her to stay and see what the bold, ill-mannered foreigners meant by such effrontery to a mandarin's niece.

The servants by this time were pressing threateningly between the men and their mistress. A few whispered words and a second display of the badge had an electrical effect on them, however. They stood as if petrified, and the younger man addressed Tu Hee: "Are you going to come quietly, or is there to be a fuss?"

"Go with you?" gasped Tu Hee. "Go where? I'm a Chinese maiden, niece of the great Weng Toy."

A sardonic smile twisted the man's lips. "Those stories will do for afterwards. We have our instructions, madam, to take you to the American Hotel. They must be obeyed. I advise you to come without making a disturbance. It will be

best for you. If not —” He shrugged his shoulders meaningly.

Mingled outrage and bewilderment kept Tu Hee silent. What did it all mean? What would Uncle Weng say if she were forced to go with the foreign devils?

“My uncle, the mandarin, will killee you.”

It sounded childish and weak to her ears, and her excitement had caused her to use broken English. She saw the men exchange amused smiles, and her fury increased.

But here Lun came on the scene. Scornfully she ignored the foreign devils. Scathingly she lashed the willowy-backed carriers with hot words and ordered them to return down the hill. The servants slunk to their places, but an immediate halt was called by the officials. A revolver covered the three of them instantly, while a voice ordered Tu Hee to come out.

Tu Hee refused to move, and calmly told them they could shoot her if they wished, but from her rickshaw she would not stir.

The younger man then told her if she refused to walk to their car they would be compelled to use force. They would give her two minutes to decide.

This opened a new phase to her terrible plight. Death she would not shrink from. No true Chinese woman would, but for these foreign devils to touch her —. She shuddered. That would leave a lasting blot on her. There was only one thing to do. Slipping from the rickshaw she passed resolutely

with head erect to where her servants were standing, glowering but helpless. "I shall go with these foreign devils to the American Hotel. Lun will come with me and you must return quickly to my uncle and tell him I have been kidnapped by two foreigners. Go!"

The servants hesitated, glancing apprehensively at their mistress, but the light in her eyes and the erect self-confidence of her bearing decided them. Even Lun gasped at her darling's sudden step into womanhood. Ignoring the threatening weapon, the carriers turned, leaving the rickshaw in the road, and tore down the hill with lightning speed.

The man who had had them covered pocketed the revolver, shrugged his shoulders, muttering: "Excellent bluff. We shall see, young lady, if you are a real Chinese mandarin's niece. If you *are* you're the first one I've seen with blue eyes."

Lun gulped with rage. Her hands fumbled against each other nervously. Fear also clutched at her heart, and she peered searchingly and with consternation into the man's face. Had the spirit of evil fallen on them after all these happy years?

The hood of the car was down and Tu Hee leaned far back. The thought of escape did not enter her head. Fatalism had been her constant companion through childhood and youth, and she accepted her present position as ordained. She was thankful that Lun on one side and her hated persecutor on the other prevented any one obtaining a glimpse of her. A dry sob settled in her throat. What

had she done that the gods permitted such an outrage?

The carriers sped toward home at a rapid gait. Their lithe, slim bodies, made agile through daily practice, would have rivalled the Roman champions of amphitheatre days. The perspiration stood out like glass beads on their copper faces and throats, the muscles of which were taut. They worshipped their young mistress, and the calamity that had overtaken her filled them with dark, superstitious fear. Why had the foreign devils kidnapped the Gift of the Gods? Rumour had whispered that the mandarin's niece had strange blood in her veins, but nevertheless everyone strongly asserted she was a daughter of China, a divine gift. But now the gods had permitted the foreign devils to take her. What did it mean?

Breathless they sought Weng Toy's apartment, but were told by his boy that he was out, and would not return for an hour. A telephone search began, but he might have been on the other side of the world for all the success they had in locating him. They must sit with folded hands for an hour, and in that time what might not happen to their young mistress?

As the news spread through the house that the Gift of the Gods had been seized by the foreigners, consternation ran tumultuous and mountains high. When an hour had passed and still the mandarin did not return, the older servants took the initiative and organized a rescue party. Weng Toy's

servants were many and they started out two hundred strong to demand or force back the Gift of the Gods. The last of the purposeful column were leaving the outer gates when Weng Toy's chair appeared in view. He surveyed the long line in amazement. What in the name of all the powers did it mean?—*his* servants deserting his house en masse !

The boy accompanying him was sent after the eager marchers with the peremptory order to halt. Chagrined, the leaders knew their only course was to obey, and in explaining lose many precious minutes. Simultaneously relief and eager hope appeared on some of the faces. Their master would be strong like thunder and lightning. Nothing could stop the great Weng Toy. He would override the hated foreigners as only a Chinese noble could. So they watched him closely as the news was given to him.

But Weng Toy did not rage. It was as if a cyclone had wrenched every ounce of energy from his body and mind. Horror and despair took hold of him. In dead tones he bade them disperse.

Slowly and reluctantly they turned back through the gates, and for the first time Weng Toy was surrounded by sullen, unwilling servants.

After ordering the car to be brought around he shut himself in his apartment. Nervously he paced back and forth. His brain refused to function rationally. Fear, hated fear, clutched and froze his heart—not for himself, no. Weng Toy

was no coward, but fear for the girl he worshipped as his own child. It caused his face to blanch and his shoulders to droop like an old man's. He dared not answer the question even mentally that nagged his brain. His nervous pacing halted in front of a tapestry, a dainty, water color affair, that Tu Hee had contrived herself. The colorings were delicate, all pinks, gold, and mauves, but the subject was sinister, grim, with the reality of the East. The central figure was that of a young girl turning away from the ancient rites of the old world to the new, the western world, glimmering on the horizon. A great longing and despair shone from her eyes, but a chain of gold, almost invisible, encircled one ankle, pulling her on. The climax of the pictured story was a phial of opium half way to her lips.

Weng Toy gazed, fascinated, at the picture. The gloom of his thoughts enfolded him so closely that he did not hear the door open and close. An angry voice broke in abruptly on his sombre musings:

“By the sun in the heavens, China is coming to a pretty pass. This is what we get for letting the dirty foreign dogs into the country.”

Quietly Weng Toy turned and faced the intruder.

“Can you throw any light on the accursed affair?” demanded the visitor impatiently.

Weng Toy made no reply and the man laughed bitterly. “Your silence says yes. So can I. They

have traced her. Bah! It was risky from the beginning. Yet by the powers of heaven, I'm glad you did it, old friend, for I love her."

Weng Toy started. He eyed the other coldly. "You have not told her of this?"

The man looked at him daringly. "Not yet. Her beauty and innocence confounded me and made me numb and dumb. But a thousand angels or devils couldn't have stopped me if I had known this would occur. Enough delay—she shall be my wife as soon as I rescue her.

"Be not so hasty, Chu Sing. Tu Hee will have a say in that."

Something in the mandarin's tone led the other to see he had laid his thoughts too bare.

"Pay no attention to what I say, Weng Toy. I'm not responsible. Despair and fear for the girl have made me mad. What are you going to do about it? It seems to me you are taking it unnaturally cool."

The door opened. "Car ready, sir."

As the two men hurried out into the long hall Weng Toy laid a hand on his companion's arm. "It would kill Tu Hee to learn the truth. If her disappearance is caused by the people we think, as of course it must be, it is our duty to deny everything. Remember, she is my niece, my own flesh and blood."

Chu Sing nodded—"And my future wife."

On a teakwood table in the entrance hall lay a small reticule. It was a dainty, effeminate thing

in chased gold, inset with pearls. Weng Toy touched it tenderly. He had given it to Tu Hee on her last birthday, and he recalled her delight in it. "My poor little Autumn Gladness! May the gods help me to save you the pain of finding out!" His voice was husky and the hand that took his hat from the servant was far from steady.

As the car turned towards the large entrance gates many eyes peered after it and silent prayers went up to the gods.

CHAPTER III

“If the ancestors of our Oriental friends could come back and glimpse this scene, what would happen?”

The eyes of the girl addressed wandered quizzically over the crowd beneath, truly a cosmopolitan assortment—Europeans, Asiatics, and Americans rubbing shoulders, beaming smiles, tossing nods, and exchanging handshakes.

“One would almost think that the wish of the idealists had been fulfilled, that the brotherhood of man was an assured thing,” continued the speaker, as he leaned a little farther over the balcony railing. “But to go back to my question, dear coz, what would happen if the occupants of the Ming tombs could walk here to-day? It gives me a shock, half sympathetic, as I try to experience the feelings of the over-civilized departed of the East could they come back and witness the furrows the West have made in their beloved garden of the gods.”

“I am glad they can’t see it,” replied the girl, without removing her gaze. “It would mean purgatory to them for millions of years.”

She was a typical American. Her accent, as well as her soft olive skin and brown eyes, be-

tokened she was familiar with the hot sunshine of the south.

After a silence, during which they surveyed idly the moving panorama, the eyes of the girl came back to the man beside her. Her face said plainly that he, in his trim uniform of a British officer, was more interesting than commingled nations below. She surveyed with a thrill of pride the clean-cut grace of his long form stretched nonchalant in the wicker chair, but her gaze grew wistful as she noted the boyish old look on the lean face tanned to a deep brown, and the keen penetrating eyes that were so full of laughs in the old days. The old days were before the world was scarred forever by the action of a European despot. Her glance fell to the left foot, which was stretched out in unnatural stiffness and just touched the hem of her skirt. Her lips compressed slightly, but with a little shake, like a sparrow that is determined to dry its wet wings in the sun, she said lightly, "Turn and look at me, David, dear, if the gay crowds make you glum."

With a sigh he relaxed into the chair. "What a beastly grouch you must think me, Grace. But it's no use. I may as well confess every smile and laugh is an effort with me now. I've lost my perspective of life."

"It's because you so unselfishly gave up your plans in August, 1914, and now that you have come back you can't understand why those who weren't there continue to hug their petty lives to

their hearts, watching over them tenderly and self-lovingly.”

“You’ve said it, Grace. It’s the cold-blooded selfishness of the people—it sickens my very soul. I tell you I want to get back, back where men, stripped of the inane conventionalities of life, clasp your hand and look you in the eye in unashamed, unstained brotherhood. The shadow of death is a great cleanser, Grace. A man’s past falls from him like a garment. It’s what you are when the great moment comes that men judge you by over there, where the fires of hell burn everything but the gold.”

“But now, dear David,” said Grace gently, “you must try for our sakes, who love you, to readjust yourself. It will be cruel, heart-rending, if the old order of things does not pass away after the most terrible, the most precious sacrifice in the world’s history, the sacrifice of youth. But if no change is apparent, except chaos, we can only do our infinitesimal part. The world’s burdens cannot be borne by a few young shoulders such as yours, no matter how willing they may be. To me it seems each one has his duty allotted to him. If it is shifted it may and does fall partly on others already overburdened, but the most of it accumulates to be apportioned back by the Great Judge.”

“Keep your faith, Grace. There isn’t much left if one doubts the unswerving undercurrent of law and order and the final triumph of right and justice throughout the universe. Perhaps sanity

will return and banish the horrible pessimism I feel clutching at me, but just now I can't catch even a glimmer of light through the dark clouds." His voice grew petulant, almost boyish, as he continued: "If it wasn't for the seemingly spiteful side of Fate's nature I might puzzle through this old world without too much grumbling, but when she lands you a knockout blow in the foot through her too willing slave, a beastly Hun bomb, and then shoots you over to a yellow land with the camouflage 'to serve your country,' it's enough, I tell you, to make a fellow toss up whether he'll end it all with a bullet."

"Listen to the child," replied Grace, lightly. "If your words didn't sound refreshing, like the juice of a pear, without any substance, Davey dear, I'd take the trouble to remind you that in tossing up Fate would stand beside you, a humourous or sardonic grin on her changeless, impassable, and insurmountable front, and have the last word."

"Guess you're right. No chance to beat her. Well, thank heaven, your silvery voice and my soothing nicotine are left me." And suiting action to words David Marsden lifted his companion's hand to his lips, and then placed a cigarette between them.

"Just like a man," pouted the girl. "You abuse Fate on your own account and then thank her for the nasty blow she has dealt me."

"Rotten luck, dear girl, I know, but it runs in the family, so what's the use? Philosophy over-

flows from the minds and electrifies the air over here, and a dose of the atmosphere once in a while won't do us any harm."

David unfolded himself rather stiffly from the chair, stood a moment, then strolled—the word hardly fits, either, as his lameness caused a decided halt in his gait—to the end of the balcony, and laconically watched the swarms below. He likened them to tireless ants, the difference being these human ants appeared restless rather than industrious.

Tired lines showed around his eyes and mouth, and the stamp of the world war, age in youth, was painfully visible. Only bitterness smouldered in the depths of his grey eyes. "The white man must have amusement, even though part of the world is a seething pot of anguished souls. Barred from Europe they come over here, to China, for diversion. It's true, Grace, that one half of the world knows not how the other half lives, but it shouldn't be—they don't want to know."

The girl purposely made her voice light. "Now, now, David, use cosmopolitan tolerance on the throngs below you and please remember, I'm a Yank, although I must confess my continuous wish is that I could add 'ally' to the name. But, dear boy, I insist that you stop brooding. Ah, here comes tea, so now meander back and bring that little bamboo table with you, so we can sit here near the railing and drink tea and make eyes at the crowd at the same time. Do you remember

how, when children, we used to fancy vocations for people? ”

“ Yes,” laughed David. “ And do you remember how furious you were one day when I insisted a man we met on the street carrying a pail was a plasterer and you stuck to it he was a baker? ”

“ Yes, yes,” laughed the girl. “ And I insisted you follow him to find out if I wasn’t right; and how disappointed I was when he joined a crowd of bricklayers ! You were a dear even in those days, David. To make up for my disappointment you took me into a baker’s shop and bought me some sugar buns.”

But Grace’s efforts were in vain. She saw the cup laid down three-quarters full, and the brooding look creep into David’s eyes again. He noticed the lapse almost immediately, however, and glanced at his companion rather guiltily, as he lifted his cup.

“ You will think me a harping boor, but when I think of those boys, Grace, the finest the world has produced, living and dying in that hell over there for lack of men with an ounce of grit in them, while I’m out of it forever, a useless clog so far as the war is concerned, I tell you a man needs to get a mighty tight grip on himself to stand it.”

“ David, I’ll bite you with words in another minute. How can you talk so ! You know your mission here is important. It may lack the danger of actual warfare, but the path isn’t clear for all

that. German snipers are ready even here to get you. Be patient with yourself just for awhile, dear boy. It's the reaction after trench life. Let me give you another cup of tea. The Chinese are past masters in this art, to say nothing of their culinary talents. I'm ravenous whenever I think of their savoury dishes.

"By the way, David, I'm beginning to think Fate has interposed on your behalf after all and turned mamma into a hard-hearted parent for your sake, for you certainly need looking after."

"Yes, it's a lucky thing for me she chose China as your place of banishment. Tough luck on you, though."

Grace smiled reminiscently, as she dropped the second lump of sugar in David's tea. "Poor mamma, she has forced herself to come to this heathen land to enable my heart to mend, when the fact of the matter is it hasn't even a crack in it and never had to my knowledge. All my protests that Rowen Langton and I were only pals fell on deaf ears. So, behold, here I am whirled to the other side of the world and enjoying the change, while poor mamma believes this is her purgatory."

David joined in her laugh, and Grace saw to it that the seriousness did not creep back to his eyes for the next half hour at least.

"Have you noticed that feather-footed porter, David? He's been providing me with no end of amusement the last ten minutes. If we weren't so

matter of fact I'd say he took us for lovers. Poor chap, he doesn't know we are merely prosaic first cousins."

David turned ruminating eyes on her. It dawned on him that he had a very pleasing, nay, ravishing, picture opposite him. The brown eyes were glinting teasingly, and the breeze was twining the stray tendrils of hair into soft curls. The blush of health glowed warmly under the tan, and two dimples lurked tantalizingly, one in the left cheek and the other in the round chin. A sense of something missed dawned on him at the same time as the realization of her beauty.

"David, for mercy's sake are you trying to count the freckles on my nose? I haven't had such a close inspection since the mumps."

"Ah—er—the fact is, I was just thinking, Grace, in England it is quite customary for first cousins to marry, you know."

A distressed flush crept over the girl's face, and to David's surprise she jumped from her chair and stood with her back to him, looking over the balcony railing.

David rose. Crossing to her side he covered the small hand resting on the railing with his own. "Forgive me, Grace, dear, I wasn't speaking lightly. You are the best little pal a fellow ever had, and I'd consider myself the luckiest chap in Christendom if—"

"Stop, please, David, stop. You don't realize what you are saying. You are just lonely and un-

settled after your terrible experiences over there. I'm not the girl for you. No," as David took her arms and turned her towards him.

"Grace, I am lonely, desperately lonely. Will you marry me?"

A sudden glow lit up the girl's face, which as suddenly faded, but it crept into and made tender the brown eyes, as she answered: "Dear boy, I missed the real foundation of your proposal then, the words 'I love you.' Loneliness isn't love, David, dear. No, don't say it. You may think you do, but a girl usually knows the signs of the fatal malady. As you say, I'm a good pal. Let me remain that always."

"You don't care, then?" There was a hurt, anxious note in David's tone.

"Not yet, thank heaven. Please help me to keep from caring, David, dear." Turning from him she pointed across the street: "There's mamma with Major Bennett on her bait. Poor mamma, neither one of us will have any peace 'til she has me in the net."

A discreet cough caused them to turn. A Chinese servant bowed before them and apologetically announced that the master was wanted in his sitting-room.

"Who wants me, Meng?"

"Tallee man, black hair lip and glasses. Chinese lady wid she."

When the servant had disappeared, after much profuse kotowing for the cash he had received,

David turned to Grace. "It looks as though Creighton is going to draw me into some secret-service work. Word has come from England that a German spy in the guise of a Chinese woman is at large here, after doing some dastardly work in Europe. I wouldn't be surprised if he has landed something. There may be some excitement. Perhaps you hadn't better come up."

"Oh, please, David, have pity on my life of inertia! I'll promise not to scream or use profane language, even though my fury urges me to scratch the creature's eyes out. Don't deny me an opportunity to see a domineering Hun become crestfallen."

"Come then. Hang it's being a woman, though."

CHAPTER IV

As the car drew up in front of the foreign hotel, Tu Hee's stoical calm broke a little and she shrank back when the door was opened for her to alight.

"Come, miss, our time is valuable. Act peaceably and it will be better for you in the long run."

Grasping Lun's hand tightly she accompanied the men through the crowds at the entrance. Ashamed and bewildered, she kept her eyes down-cast. Poor child, suddenly and without any preparation, she had been thrust into a strange world. The net was closing tighter on her every minute. She dared not think of the outcome. Was it only this morning, she wondered, that she had breakfasted with Uncle Weng, after which they had walked so gaily in the garden? A mist over her eyes warned that tears were very near. That would be a sign of weakness. Whatever the gods willed must be met with fortitude.

A familiar voice fell on her ears. "Why, Rod, if it isn't Tu Hee, the mandarin's niece! What in the world can she be doing here?"

Tu Hee glanced up quickly. Her heart gave a big leap as she recognized in the stylishly dressed woman near her the American from the neighbouring hill. "Please, please," she began, but her

captors, impatient at her slow progress, hurried her forward to the inner corridor. Here she and Lun were thrust into what looked to be a big bird cage, and shot mysteriously up through space. A queer sensation of falling swept over her. She felt Lun's hand close tightly on her wrist, but her voice sounded far away. "It's the devil's spell they're casting on us." And then the hated foreigners brought her back to vivid, fearful reality.

"This way, Miss." Tu Hee found herself on the level with the floor again.

"Hurry, darlin'," cried Lun, "before the bewitched floor goes up again."

Lun crowded against her mistress as she spoke, and they moved mechanically along the corridor, a guard in front and behind them.

The room they entered was large and richly furnished. Tu Hee saw at a glance it was a typical Western sitting-room. The younger man summoned a servant by pressing a button. After instructing him in a low voice he turned to Tu Hee. "Take a chair. I guess we won't deny a woman a little comfort, even if she is an enemy."

But Tu Hee might have been a statue for all the heed she paid to him.

"Damn clever acting," he muttered.

Lun, who had been standing close to her mistress, her hands working nervously, now approached the official, and shaking her clenched hand, cried shrilly: "No actress—Misse Tu Hee belong great Weng Toy family. You all be killee.

He great man — hees servants, hundreds of them, stickee you through.”

Lun's excited harrangue provoked loud, hilarious guffaws from the two men, which, however, became suddenly hushed as the door opened. Standing erect, they saluted the young British officer, who entered, accompanied by a girl.

The younger man, as usual, was the spokesman. “We have captured the mysterious Fraulein Kleiser, sir. You will find her acting superb. Her innocent demeanour would hoodwink the devil himself, beggin' your pardon, miss,” and he apologetically bowed to the girl.

Reluctantly David Mardsen approached the captive. Tu Hee was standing with her back to him. She had not moved a muscle since entering the room. David was a little nonplussed at the stiffness of her attitude. He wondered if he were diplomat enough to deal with a graven image. As he paused in front of the slight, girlish form he gave a perceptible start. “Why, Creighton, what do you mean? This is a mere child.”

“Wonderful make-up, sir.”

Embarrassment and a sort of humiliation grew on David as he noted the beauty and youth before him. His eyes dwelt fascinatedly on the long curling lashes, and sudden impatience seized him to see what the drooping lids concealed. Innocence, he felt instinctively, would leap at him could he but induce those white lids to flutter back. His impatient desire mastered him, and impulsively

he leaned towards the motionless form, "Won't you please look at me?"

The white lids fluttered, and David looked into two eyes, the blueness of which dazzled him. He had seen many blue eyes, had received softest smiles and sauciest sparkles from them and had turned away lightly and unconcerned, but these were different. He wanted to look and keep on looking, and mixed with his desire was a baffling feeling that he might gaze and search forever and still never fathom their depths.

Was an electric current attaching itself to Tu Hee also? At first, humiliation that a man dared look at her with manner so unabashed swept over her and dwarfed every other feeling. She felt powerless to look away, however. The piercing grey eyes held hers open against her will. Then fear gripped her. An impulse she had never experienced before, and yet seemed to have belonged to her for aeons, took possession of her, and with a little cry she dealt the brown face so near her own a stinging blow.

She paid no attention to the startled cry of the foreign woman who sprang forward. A sense of savage pleasure parted her lips, as she saw the trickle of blood discolouring the brown of the face, where her jewelled nail shield had broken the flesh. She was seized roughly by the two officials, but she was no longer afraid. She had struck a hated foreigner. Why had her nail shield not been poisoned! Oh, why did they torture her

so? Her wrist was caught as in a vise. The taint of their touch would never wear off. Would they kill her, or would they give her time to do it herself and enter eternity purified?

And then a clear voice reached her ears. She wasn't heeding, but somehow this voice, musical and resonant, reminded her of temple bells, soothing, deep, and clear. It was the foreign officer. He was in front of her again. He was angry too, but not at her. How strange! He was ordering the men to release her. Tu Hee peered more closely. The blood on his face fascinated her. What a deep gash she had made. Her head seemed queer — the foreign officer was swaying away from her. He might bleed to death. Fumbling in her dress she held out a tiny piece of embroidered silk. But he had gone. Everything was black — perhaps she was dying.

When Tu Hee came to, for a few seconds the past hour was blotted from her memory and she gazed about bewildered. The couch she was on wasn't her own and the room was strange but very pretty. It was all pale blue and gold, like a foreign woman's boudoir. Foreign — ah! — she covered her face with her hands as memory rushed over her. Then two soft hands were on her own and a familiar voice spoke to her, "Dear little girl — little Tu Hee, don't be frightened. It's all right, dear."

Slowly Tu Hee withdrew her hands. Bewilder-

ment was still on her face as she murmured, "It's the American, Mrs. Claymore. Please, please, why am I here?"

The woman sat on the side of the couch. Taking one of Tu Hee's hands in her own she said, "It has been a terrible mistake, dear. The Government officials took you for some one else."

"Some one else?" questioned Tu Hee, perplexity in her voice. "Who? Do they not know I belong to the house of the great Weng Toy?"

"They do now, dear. It will all be explained later. Just rest for a few minutes."

"No, no," exclaimed Tu Hee, slipping from the couch, "I rest at home." Her voice was almost childish in its appeal as she turned to Mrs. Claymore. "Please — you my friend — take me home."

"Won't you please have some tea first?"

Tu Hee looked into a pair of brown eyes so big and friendly that her lips parted a little and she bowed gracefully, as she obediently took the beverage.

No word was spoken as she partook of the refreshment, but she stole surreptitious glances at the girl opposite her. When she had sipped the last of the tea, the foreign girl leaned forward and addressed her in a low, eager tone. "My name is Grace Ashton. If you can ever forgive us for this painful affair, please let me hear from you some time."

Tu Hee smiled and bowed again, and still a

little bewildered allowed herself to be led by Mrs. Claymore to a waiting car, where she was embraced by the frantic Lun, who laughed and cried in turns at seeing her child safe.

Beside the car stood the British officer, a long thin plaster dividing the dark brown of his cheek with its startling whiteness.

At sight of him Tu Hee shrank back, clinging to Mrs. Claymore. David came forward. A shadow was on his face and his voice was tense with feeling as he tried to right himself in the eyes of the Chinese girl. "I know my conduct appears to you inexcusable, Miss Weng Toy, but when you are strong enough to listen to an explanation I feel sure I can clear myself. Won't you please trust me and give me the honor and pleasure of driving you to your home?"

Something in the voice stirred Tu Hee strangely. Instinctively she trusted this foreigner, and wondered at the moment how she could have ever feared him. His gaze was so clear and direct.

She bowed her assent, and David handed her into the front seat of the car.

Mrs. Claymore smiled, relieved that a tense situation was over, and took her place in the back, beckoning Lun in beside her. Lun was not so easily dealt with, however. She had had enough of foreigners and foreign automobiles. Nor was she willing that the monster should go without her until it had disgorged her child.

Tu Hee was half inclined to obey her nurse,

but a glance at the profile beside her with its long white disfigurement decided her. Peremptorily she turned, "Please, Lun, seat yourself quietly. This foreign gentleman wishes to take us quickly to my uncle."

Lun turned an aghast face on her mistress, twisted her hands nervously, and seated herself beside Mrs. Claymore.

But Tu Hee had no thought for Lun. A gratified, pleased smile which she had glimpsed had set her heart beating rapidly, and she felt her mysterious adventure had opened up a glorious new avenue of life.

David drove rapidly. Fain would he have allowed the car to crawl, but common sense ruled, telling him he must clear up without delay every vestige of the blunder caused by the bungling of the officials.

The streets were thronged with people, but for once Tu Hee took no interest in her surroundings. She even felt no shame at riding openly and beside a foreigner. Indeed, the significance of her action did not dawn on her until hours afterwards and she had had time to think in the seclusion of her own apartment.

The car stopped at the American house on the hill, but Mrs. Claymore insisted on accompanying Tu Hee right to her home. She laughed at what she called male denseness. "I think, David, the present situation needs a woman's tact, and I am sure Miss Weng Toy will agree with me."

Tu Hee had an idea her uncle's wrath might be considerably mitigated by the gracious American woman and, considering her former feelings, it was a surprise how very much she wanted the whole nasty affair shoved back into the past. She could not exactly define her reason. She dared not acknowledge that the silent, courteous man beside her figured in it largely.

As they neared the great entrance gates of her home, a touring car turned out and approached them. Tu Hee leaned forward eagerly. The veneer of over-civilization dropped from her, and clasping David's arm she said tremulously, "My uncle, sir. He approaches in the grey car."

David drew up, his gaze fixed with interest on the occupants of the oncoming machine. Weng Toy's face was set in tense lines. He glanced neither to left nor right, nor did his companion or driver.

Tu Hee, fearful of their passing right by, rose to her feet. Her voice was a half laugh and a half sob as she called, "Please stop, Uncle Weng—it's Tu Hee."

The amazed driver put the brakes on so suddenly that only sheer luck averted a catastrophe. The huge car swung around like a balked animal, but as it saw fit to keep its balance, no one bothered his head as to what might have been.

Weng Toy's dignity deserted him entirely. He did not wait to open the door, but vaulted it like a school boy, and ran, arms outstretched and bare-

headed—his hat had already been jolted off—to the excited Tu Hee.

“Yes, yes,” assured the girl, “I am safe and sound, uncle. It was all a stupid mistake.” She glanced shyly at David. “Mrs. Claymore will explain, uncle—and please thank this gentleman. He has been so kind.”

Weng Toy stiffened. He bowed courteously to Mrs. Claymore. Then his eyes scanned keenly the face of the foreigner seated beside his ward. Tu Hee fidgetted, as she fancied his eyes lingered on the court plaster, but she beamed again as she saw his hand extended. She knew trust always went with the mandarin’s hand-clasp.

Weng Toy instructed the chauffeur to drive both cars into the courtyard, and they all walked back to the house. Mrs. Claymore cleverly monopolized Weng Toy. David found himself beside Lun, while Tu Hee followed behind with Chu Sing.

Tu Hee was asked all manner of questions by her ruffled companion, which she answered evasively, and when he grew insistent pleaded she was too tired to talk, that Uncle Weng would explain.

For the first time in her life Tu Hee experienced the feeling of envy. She envied Lun. The old nurse was talking and gesticulating volubly. The girl’s heart fluttered. Even she, stolid Lun, had capitulated to the foreigner.

Tea was served in the library, a concession extended to only Weng Toy’s intimate friends. Tu

Hee hadn't hoped for this, but a glance at her uncle's face told her that Mrs. Claymore's tact had won the day and banished the last vestige of a cloud. Not only this, but the mutual goodwill between her uncle and the officer was unmistakable.

Chu Sing was the only one of the party who was out of his element. He sat apart, moody and silent, nibbling cakes and drinking tea, and all the time furtively watching the Englishman. The persistent question which darkened his face was whether the foreigner's wound meant an act of chivalry to Tu Hee.

Weng Toy urged his guests to remain for dinner. David would willingly have set aside his business engagement, but a warning glance from Mrs. Claymore bade him leave with her, and he reluctantly obeyed. However, he eagerly accepted Weng Toy's invitation for the next week, and as he bent over Tu Hee's hand at parting he felt like imploring her to not forget him entirely in the long interval of seven days. But common-sense triumphed again, and merely murmuring a few commonplace civilities, he accompanied Mrs. Claymore from the room.

When the door had closed on the foreigners, Weng Toy took Tu Hee's face between his hands. "My little girl looks not unhappy or downcast for all her harrowing experience. She has truly imbibed the brave spirit of the house of Weng Toy."

“It was terrible at first, uncle.” Tu Hee shuddered, “but,” and her eyes beamed up at him, “the foreigners dispelled all that. They were very kind to me.”

“That young man is here on an important mission for the great war. He is already a hero, my child. The scar he carries on his foot is the symbol of his share in the ultimate triumph of right over the powers of darkness in Europe.”

Tu Hee’s eyes shone like twin sapphires as her hero worship was being fed.

Weng Toy, unaware of the fire that had been kindled, continued: “Mrs. Claymore wished me to explain to you more fully the unfortunate blunder made by the two Government officials, as she did not wish to harass you with details, when you were among strangers and still suffering from the effects of the shock. The two men who kidnapped you mistook you for a German spy, who is in Peking trying to undermine China. Stupid of them, but as my little girl has come to no harm the best thing to do is to overlook and forget the whole affair, especially as they thought they were working for China and the God of Justice. Now, child, run up to your room and rest for an hour before dinner. I must go and explain to Chu Sing.”

Tu Hee’s feet barely touched the stairs as she flew to her room and her heart sang until she was dizzy, “He is a hero. He won his scar in the great war of justice.”

CHAPTER V

THE blue of the June sky beamed over New York as brightly as it did over China. There was not the least doubt of it in Neil Culver's mind as he stepped from his car and crossed to Tung Yung's curio store. Yes, he decided as he stood at the window surveying a sample of the marvels within, New York was the one place in the world—but still China had a way of beckoning you that was hard to resist. Then a shadow crossed his face, as the tragedy of the past touched him. With an effort he shook it off and stepped into the store.

Tung Yung came forward beaming and bowing profusely, acting the part of the courteous, well-bred proprietor in a way to send Yen, his assistant, off to another customer with joyful heart. Yen was a perfected pattern of his master—an exact counterpart, so far as actions went, of the obsequious Tung Yung.

“Well, Mr. Tung Yung, I see you still pay us the compliment of displaying all your goods before our eyes instead of leading us, as they do in your native land, from one cubby hole to another before showing us your choice titbits.”

“Ah!” Tung Yung beamed appreciatively. “Americans good taste and pockets as good.”

Culver laughed. "I suppose you are contemplating retiring. Lucky man. You will go back to China and live like a mandarin, eh?"

A wistful look crossed the man's face. He shook his head. "Not yet."

Culver laid a hand on the Chinaman's sleeve. "Don't wait too long, Mr. Tung Yung. Money buys but an infinitesimal part of this world's wealth, after all."

Tung Yung looked at his customer sharply. Personal enquiries being considered the height of Chinese politeness, and, as stated before, Tung Yung was an adept in this art, he questioned, "The foreign healer lose his great happiness in China?—never recover one so great again?"

Culver shook his head sadly. "No. It is said time is a healer, but our wound has never healed."

The Oriental looked sympathetic. "Very sad, very sad, but your adopted son, he great comfort to the healer and his madam?"

"Yes, he has more than fulfilled all expectations."

"He great man?—graduate of Yale?"

"Harvard," corrected Culver. "Yes, he came off with high honors and now he is doing his bit for civilization over in Europe."

The Chinaman's eyes narrowed. "Very dangerous—risk life!"

Culver's face was grave. There was a slight break in his voice as he replied, "He has offered

his life. Whether it will be taken rests with Providence."

"Yes, may the gods protect him."

"Thank you, Mr. Tung Yung. That is all we can do now—pray."

"He win medal, not so?"

"Yes, Paul has been awarded the Victoria Cross. He's a wonderful lad."

"He come from great house," asserted Tung Yung, satisfaction in his tones.

"Ah, you have heard about his adoption?"

The Chinaman looked at his customer warily. "Rumour travels like the four winds, Dr. Culver."

"To be sure," assented Culver. "Perhaps you have also heard of the great honour your own countrymen have conferred on him in recognition of his work in the world war?"

Tung Yung shook his head. Then, tilting it sidewise, smiled blandly and expectantly, waiting for Culver to continue.

"As you say, news, even the best, travels quickly, and word of Paul's award evidently reached China with lightning speed, for he immediately received a congratulatory cable from Prince Tsoo in which he requested that Paul accept as a token of older China's appreciation the famous sacred ruby of the Chow dynasty."

"Eh!" For an instant the bland civility of the man dropped from him. Amazement and incredulity held him dumb.

His strange silence passed unnoticed by Culver, however, who smiled reminiscently into the case of curios before him.

With an effort Tung Yung forced his lips to separate, but it was rather a weak smile, and a person who was not wrapped in the past would have at once discerned a note of anxiety in his voice as he questioned, "You mean the sacred ruby of the house of Woo Wang, the great Emperor, leave China—leave the place where the gods placed it?"

Culver raised his head. "You know about the stone? It is evidently an heirloom of considerable antiquity?"

The mask of subtlety slipped into its accustomed place as the Chinaman replied, "Who not know about the great sacred ruby of the Chow dynasty? For a moment, sir, I was startled. I was thinking you, a foreign healer, was to own the stone, but it goes to your *adopted* son, Paul Hing Kwong"—Tung Yung looked apologetic but his voice was firm as he added—"a direct descendant of the great emperor himself. That's as it should be, of course." And he waved his hands in a sweeping bow.

Culver was now awake to the undercurrent of dissatisfaction his announcement had set in motion. As he looked into the oblique eyes peering so sharply into his own, he pondered on the tenacity of the hold this race kept on the past.

"Has it ever occurred to you, Mr. Tung Yung,

that nothing can stay the evolution of the race? That not even a nation such as China, with her four hundred millions, can clutch forever the skeleton of the past? ”

“ Skeleton? No. We yet have the substance, but excuse me, sir, the foreigner will put the shroud on us. ”

Culver smiled. The old indicator, tradition. And after all, he asked himself, “ What would a country amount to without it? ”

“ They send the ruby to this country, sir? ” The man’s voice was still uneasy.

“ That hasn’t been decided yet. The East has been calling Mrs. Culver and myself for some time now, and I’m afraid we shall have to obey very soon. If so, we’ll safeguard the sacred ruby there, instead of here, until my son’s return. ”

“ Safeguard—yes—you say it well. ”

“ Why, Mr. Tung Yung, you don’t anticipate trouble for us in connection with the jewel, do you? ” An amused flicker showed in Culver’s eyes as he watched the Easterner’s serious face.

“ Maybe no—maybe yes. ” He shrugged his shoulders and waved his hands as he added, “ If for Mr. Paul Hing Kwong, Why? I ask. But if for a foreigner, maybe I say. ”

“ Ah, I see. Well, as Mr. Paul is the sole owner, fear and caution may as well be dismissed. ” Then jestingly Culver questioned, “ But have you no antidote for any possible evil, Mr. Tung Yung? ”

The Chinaman's eyes narrowed, but the obsequious smile showed the white teeth as he replied: "No antidote break Chinese will, but here something guard jewel from robbers." He beckoned and Culver followed him to an inner room.

Old-time memories rushed over him as he stood viewing the all-pervading East glowing there. Rich tapestries hung from the walls, relieved by panels of weird but beautiful design, while furniture of the most exquisite carving was strewn luxuriously about. The subtle aroma of incense pervaded the room and soothed Culver's tired nerves into pleasant relaxation mingled with agreeable expectancy. The ever-present Goddess of Mercy reigned supreme from a small alcove banked on each side with flowering plants of the East.

A gratified smile glimmered on Tung Yung's face as he watched his guest's unconcealed appreciation. His steady tact forbade him to disturb the foreigner, so quietly slipping from the room he left Culver alone with his memories.

Culver walked from one to another of the rare, beautiful furnishings, touching each piece softly as if afraid of awakening harshly the slumbering past. He smiled tolerantly, and perhaps a little cynically, as he stood before the household god, the God of Wealth. The rising incense evinced that homage had but recently been paid the expressionless, stony-eyed deity. He ran his hands over the teakwood furniture and felt he was greeting

old friends. Instinctively his steps paused before the Goddess of Mercy. Here also incense was still being offered up, and the goddess accepted the homage as stoically and unmoved as the race who worshipped her. But now memory sharp and quick cut into Culver's reveries. A tiny grave back in the hills of China cast a dark, sinister blot over the pleasant musings. Grief had enclosed him tightly in her dark cloak, yet a ray of light had penetrated and beckoned him back to the land where joy and grief had locked hands. Irma was right. He would accede to her request and return to the East if but to say farewell to the past. Relief that his mind was made up surged through him as Tung Yung appeared in the doorway, closely followed by a servant carrying a tray.

The Chinaman bowed. "I take the liberty of asking the foreign healer to drink tea with me. It gives great pleasure to see your pleasure." And he waved his hands significantly towards the treasures spread so lavishly about.

Culver's bow was almost Eastern as he replied: "You have done me a great service, Mr. Tung Yung, in showing me this wonderful room of yours. This glimpse of the East has decided me to see China once more before I die."

Tung Yung waxed confidential over tea, telling Culver he too would very soon return to China, but not to stay, though, he added. "No, no, business here too good for that." However, his own affairs didn't occupy him too much to prevent him

asking Culver pointed and personal questions. The latter, believing himself a connoisseur on the Chinese mind, answered unreservedly and good-humouredly.

“Now for antidote,” exclaimed Tung Yung, when the servant had carried away the tray of empty dishes.

“I suppose you have it concealed here as a weapon of defence for your collection?”

Tung Yung replied by a shake of the head. He was carefully moving his fingers along the under edge of the small teakwood table at which they were sitting, and the crease between his brows betokened he was not doing it for a pastime. Culver watched him curiously as he repeated his finger movements several times. Bending his head, the Chinaman inspected closely the top edge of the table. Then taking a small magnifying glass from an inner pocket he peered through it. Almost instantly he emitted a grunt of satisfaction. Turning to Culver he explained, “This table is a perfect deception.”

Culver nodded, secretly wondering if his host were developing madness.

“I will have to trouble you to move, Dr. Culver. The glass tells me I am working on the wrong side.”

“Certainly,” assented Culver, rising and moving to one side.

The Chinaman seated himself where Culver had been, and repeated the same finger movements.

This time the result was a slight click, and Culver's mystified gaze saw the top of the table fly back, disclosing what appeared to be the inside of a large jewel case. But instead of the delicate tints on which jewels usually rest, the inside of this was padded with black satin, and on its centre, in rather singular contrast, rested a box of green jade about five inches square. Tung Yung touched another spring and the square of glass protecting the box slid back like a panel, leaving just enough space for it to be lifted out. He then took from another drawer in the table a small glass jar with a perforated top, from which he dusted his hands with a fine yellow powder.

Culver, impatient at what he considered unnecessary ceremony, bent over the green box. He was about to reach out a finger to run over the smooth surface of this strange piece of antiquity, when a hoarse cry rang through the room and he was roughly brushed aside. He straightened up, looking at the Chinaman in surprise. Tung Yung was livid, and Culver noticed the hand which still grasped his arm trembled.

"You touch that box, you die!"

The man's shuddering tone made clear he was stating an undoubted fact rather than a threat, but Culver jestingly interpreted the latter.

"I see you prize the jewel box highly, Mr. Tung Yung," he replied lightly, "but I assure you my desire for it isn't out of legitimate proportions."

But the Oriental didn't smile. Instead, it was

in awed and impressive tones he explained: "You not understand me, Dr. Culver—you would laugh at me. That jewel protector deadly. A man touch it and he die unceasingly. No, that not the word. You scare my English away. What I want to say is, he die for sure. It was meant to be that way. It thousands years old—and killed hundreds people."

Culver listened in amazement to the man's statement. The old weird, mystic influence of the East seemed all at once to fill the room, and his eyes rested on the piece of jade as though they were watching a sleeping reptile.

"This box," continued Tung Yung, "once belonged to the Empress Woo Wang. My family its custodian for thousand years."

"Rather a disturbing article to have lying about. How do you hypnotize its deadly influence, Mr. Tung Yung, if I may ask?"

"This gold powder is the antidote. So long as I have this on my hands I can handle it as much as I please." As he spoke, the Chinaman lifted the case and turned it about for Culver's inspection. Suddenly both hands closed over the box and he leaned towards his interested spectator and whispered impressively in his ear: "What I just tell you, Dr. Culver, is great secret. Only possessors of the two sacred rubies must ever know. You soon to be custodian of my country's great relic, so I tell you, see?"

Tung Yung, apparently satisfied with Culver's

murmur of appreciation, once again turned his attention to the box. Culver watched interestedly as the Chinaman touched a concealed spring, at which the top of the box flew back, disclosing softly tinted green satin on which the dragon with a thousand eyes was embroidered in pure gold.

"It's a wonderful piece of work, Mr. Tung Yung," conceded Culver, "but in this case it is true that beauty is only skin deep. It is almost too gruesome a thing to live with."

"You not care to have it?" questioned the Oriental.

Culver shook his head. "Too deadly a weapon for the worst thief."

"Ah, you no understand. You take this box to China—news spread—robbers keep away from sacred ruby, see? They say thousand devils in this box. They scared—not one dare come near. But I see you not like, Dr. Culver." So saying, the Chinaman placed the green jade box back in its black and gold bed, wiped the gold dust from his hands and covered the weird weapon out of sight with the teakwood table top. "Maybe in China," he continued, "the foreign healer change his mind. Then come to Tung Yung, eh? Who know? All future dark mystery."

Culver looked in surprise at the serious face of the usually urbane dealer. Tung Yung's smile had slipped off. Standing there was his long, slim fingers groping nervously over the mysterious, centuries old heirloom, he seemed to embody

all the dark superstitions and paganism of the East.

As Culver walked home from Tung Yung's store, the spell of China was still on him. He could no longer blind himself to the fact that the East was where the real years of his life, short as they were, had been lived. Resolutely he had kept his eyes on the road ahead. Fear of weakening had kept him from even glimpsing the past. But now, in spite of all his earnest striving, in spite of the fame that had crept on him unawares, he knew these years were but bracketed milestones. Destiny was bidding him close the bracket and beckoning him forward to continue the past before the period was put into his sentence of life.

Sixteen years before, with determined purpose, he and his wife had taken up new duties and aims in life. For sanity's sake they made their motto:

“ Act—act in the living Present!

Heart within, and God o'erhead!”

Culver had plunged into the very heart of hospital work. His reputation grew, and surgical fame swept over him. Still he dared not pause. Instead of humanity reaching out its arms to him, the reverse happened. He pleaded to be of greater use. Especially to little children was the genius of the man devoted. In time, work and acquired philosophy lightened the road with the soft if dim light of resignation.

At first Paul, an atom of the East, had been

but small balm for the loss of his own child. He watched him grow and develop as a scientific experimenter might observe some new development in his laboratory. But the deep, staunch affection of the little Easterner, combined with unusual intelligence, made secret inroads into the hearts which had adopted him, and Culver and his wife discovered one day that they were bound to the boy with chains of iron.

They followed with personal pride his amazing progress through college, while his keen grasp of world problems sometimes made them hold their breath and wonder if he was not destined to hold up the torch for the Old World, the pagan world of China.

But their creation of future ideals was clouded when in the Spring of 1915 this youth, who was destined for great things, stood before them and calmly announced that his place was on the soil of France, where he would do his infinitesimal part to stop the hordes of evil from engulfing the world.

Neither Neil Culver nor Irma murmured against his decision, but the mother hunger in Irma's eyes could not be concealed. As she looked at the slim, clear-eyed youth, and saw high resolve and duty to the death written on his face, terror of the inevitable gripped her, and turning bewildered to her husband she cried: "Neil, Neil, why does God covet our very best? It is cruel, cruel!"

For the next few weeks, artificiality, that human

mask, hated above all things by the Culvers, reigned supreme in their household. Sometimes they even succeeded in deceiving each other with it. Paul's gaiety appeared so spontaneous, his Western wit so ready, that his foster-parents congratulated themselves that the anguish their souls were undergoing was known only to themselves.

Irma watched over the boy those last days as though he were her baby of three again. When Paul had voiced his resolve it seemed the second death knell to her hopes had been sounded. The uselessness, the inanity of trying to live to oneself came stronger upon her as she looked into the wide brown eyes, in whose depths glimmered the beacon light of already thousands of the world's youth, and the barrier of inevitable sacrifice stretched before her.

But the months passed and Paul's young life had not yet been laid on the altar of sacrifice. Instead, the news had now come that he had gone smiling and with head erect into the very jaws of death, which had not closed on him — had covered the retreat and saved the lives of his comrades. France had invested him with her highest honour and Britain's King had pinned the Victoria Cross on his breast. China herself had thrilled at the news, while her old regime tossed its most precious heirloom at his feet—the sacred ruby of the East.

Irma began to hope again. Like the majority of frail humans, who believe their possessions

have in some mysterious way the special guardianship of Providence, she let reasoning and philosophy slip away and placed her step daringly into the misty, uncertain future, forgetting that hollowness and disillusion lay under the soft white covering.

As Culver stepped into the hall, his wife's laugh floated out to him from the library. A smile passed over his face; laughter had been very rare of late. Upon entering the room, a tall form rose from the depths of an easy chair and advanced to meet him. His hands were taken in a vice-like grip and a familiar voice cried, "Here I am again, old chap, bobbing up after ten years of India."

Culver returned the grip, genuine welcome glowing on his face, as he exclaimed: "Just the way I thought you'd be cropping up, Chess Reynolds. Turning native for ten years and then walking in as casually as though you were our next-door neighbor!"

"Well, the fact is, Neil, where you are concerned I think I've overcome my abhorrence for the pen, but Sutherland, whom I ran across out there, told me you and Mrs. Culver had gone off on another globe jaunt."

"He was misinformed. We haven't put a foot off American soil for sixteen years, not promising the spell will last," he added, glancing at his wife.

"Jupiter! how time flies, and youth too, but in the opposite direction."

“I can’t say the years have detracted from you, Chess. The English officer type is a little more pronounced, that’s all,” remarked Culver, glancing admiringly at the lean firmness of the face before him, tanned to a deep brown, and the eyes, which life had made a little keener, a little more penetrating, but with the philosopher’s twinkle in their depths. “You’ve done some nice girl an injustice, Chess. No doubt the British Government needed you, but ye gods, man, why didn’t you take a wife with you? You don’t know what you’ve missed out of life.” And Culvert’s glance rested on Irma’s smiling face.

Reynolds’ lips lost their curve as his eyes followed his friend’s but his tone was light as he made answer, “Your happiness was an incentive, old chap, but unfortunately Providence seldom duplicates women.”

Irma laughed, while Culver replied good-humouredly: “That comes too glibly for one who claims he has had no practice.”

Irma shook her head. “I’m afraid Mr. Reynolds finds the path of bachelorhood too smooth and easy an one to turn off. He tells me he is going to leave us again almost immediately.”

“You don’t say? Where now, Chess?”

“I’m following in your footsteps this time, old man — China.”

“What luck! Just where Irma and I are off to.”

"Neil!" Irma rose to her feet.

"Yes, dear; I made up my mind to-day while in Tung Yung's. The old heathen cast the spell of the East over me."

"When are we to start?" Irma's voice trembled.

"That's for you to decide, dear. Say the word and we go to-morrow."

"Why that's jolly!" exclaimed Reynolds. "What's to hinder us making the trip together? I can arrange my time to suit yours. The only important business I have over there is to see the boy."

"David, you mean? Has he recovered from his wound yet?"

"Not altogether, I fancy. Not that the young jackanapes complains to me, but a letter came from his aunt, Mrs. Ashton—you remember her—and she says he is as restless as a seal in a desert."

"Poor boy!"

Irma's voice drew Reynolds' gaze to her sharply. "By the way, Mrs. Culver, how's Paul? the little shaver I left absorbing American life like an eel thrown into a new pond?"

Reynolds listened interestedly, plainly delighted at the boy's achievements.

"Well, well! so I've lost my wager after a dozen years, let alone twenty, and I'm mighty glad. The human race has the same root after all.

India opened my eyes in that respect. I look aghast at my old egotistical self. What a confounded narrow-minded ass I was."

"Don't be too hard on yourself, Chess. It's a common failing."

"Yes, and a lot of people will have to expand mighty fast if they want to be in line with the boys when they come back from Europe."

Quietly Irma slipped away to superintend dinner. She stood for a moment at the open window in the hall. The sun was sinking in a bed of gold and crimson, and she smiled as her eyes followed one golden gleam into the far East.

CHAPTER VI

FOR the tenth time in the past half hour Tu Hee had wandered to her window to see if the sun had succeeded in peeping out before going down for the day. But the big drops still pattered down. Dropping to the floor she rested her elbows on the cushioned window seat and contemplated the bushes and flowering trees drooping under their increasing burden. But the sight of the garden proved rather tantalizing, in view of the fact that its beauties were at present denied her. Her eyes, seeking restlessly for a diversion, incidentally lighted on one in the shape of an American magazine. Drawing the book to her she looked critically and a little wistfully at the foreign beauty smiling at her from the frontispiece.

“You are very pretty,” confessed Tu Hee aloud. “No, that word is too insipid for you. You are beautiful, far more beautiful than I could ever be.” A sigh accompanied the last words. “And yet my nose is straight like yours; my lips curve the same; and there are three dimples in my face when I laugh instead of two. My eyes are blue too, and yet there is a big, big difference, Miss American Beauty; yes, a great big difference. You’re white and I am yellow. And some of you

white-skins are as nice as you look. The young white-skinned officer for example, and yet Lun warns me to be careful. I wonder why? But Lun didn't see the little lights in his eyes that made them twinkly and soft. Chu Sing has lights in his too, but the more they shine the harder and more cruel they look. But what do men matter, except Uncle Weng? I'm a little idiot, as Miss American Beauty would say, for mooning in the rain." Tossing aside the magazine Tu Hee jumped to her feet, shook out her gown, which rippled in a silky mauve sheen to the tiny rose slippers, and darted from the room.

She paused at the head of the staircase, listening intently, but as only silence greeted her, she sped lightly to the ground floor, where she again paused. She proceeded a little more cautiously now, and upon reaching the door of her uncle's study stood alert for any sound. Reassured that the way was clear she turned the brass handle of the heavy door and warily looked in. Swinging it to noiselessly she crept across the big room, where Weng Toy sat in an armchair reading. Smiling gleefully, Tu Hee clasped her hands over his eyes, at the same time ruffling his hair with her chin.

"It's the water sprite. She has me this time. I surrender!" cried the mandarin, lifting his hands and letting the book he had been reading slide to the floor.

"Let me see, what penalty shall I exact?"

You're a naughty uncle. You don't deserve ever to see your poor Autumn Glad—no Sadness, any more, letting her mope all alone in the rain."

"Please, please, good sprite, I couldn't live without my Autumn Gladness. Isn't there some other penalty you might exact?"

"Um, um—let me see. You do sound penitent." Loosening one hand Tu Hee placed her gold nail shield against her lips contemplatively.

One eye released, the prisoner blinked up at her.

"Oh, you're peeping! Just for that you shan't read another line to-day." And capturing the book from the floor Tu Hee climbed to her guardian's knee and rested her head contentedly against his shoulder.

Patting her hand, Weng Toy said regretfully: "My little girl grows lonely with only an old uncle around to play with."

"*Without* him around," corrected Tu Hee.

A sigh escaped Weng Toy.

Tu Hee sat bolt upright and peered anxiously into his face. "You sigh. You not happy. In one more second Tu Hee weep, Uncle Weng."

"No, no, child. I am unhappy only when I think of the time when the gods shall order me to join my ancestors."

Tu Hee threw an arm around his neck and pressed her face closer. "The gods couldn't be so cruel, for then Tu Hee would have to go too."

"No, no, that would make gods angry, little Autumn Gladness. Gods say you must marry."

“Marry?” Tu Hee lifted her head and drew back. “Whom?”

“Do you think your old uncle has picked your husband?” Weng Toy’s eyes did not waver under the searching look from the blue ones.

Tu Hee smiled. “It’s China’s custom for brides to be to have no choice, but my Uncle Weng is not like that.”

A shadow flitted over the mandarin’s face. He avoided the look of perfect trust bent on him. “You love me too well, little Tu Hee.”

Tu Hee looked puzzled. “Uncle Weng, I believe you have an eye on a husband and you are waiting for my eye to fix him. Confess now! No, you won’t frighten me, for I know you wouldn’t force me to do anything.” Slipping from his knee she stood before him waiting.

Weng Toy picked up the magazine from the floor and began turning its pages carefully.

Tu Hee watched this proceeding a little indignantly. Her hurt pride bade her leave the room but her barrier of respect intercepted her. And then to her surprise her guardian held towards her the American Magazine.

“If the allotment of a husband, Autumn Gladness, rested alone with me, here would be my choice.”

Tu Hee’s astonished eyes fell on the likeness of a young man in the uniform of a British officer. But he was not an Englishman, or an American.

Indeed, unless her eyes were playing her false, he was not a foreigner at all, but one of her own countrymen—as noble-looking as any mandarin or prince. Yes, decidedly the gods had placed special favour on him. The wide brown eyes looked out as fearlessly—Tu Hee bent closer. Where had she seen that same dauntless, candid look before? A flush crept to her cheeks. Yes, there was no doubt of it—there was the same unconquerable look in the young Englishman's eyes. But there was something about this face that even the foreigner lacked. This was more of a boy's face, trustful and appealing. The world had not yet left its scar on the curved mouth, that would have been almost effeminate if the chin had not been so firm, while the forehead—. Tu Hee sighed in delight. She had once seen a picture in the foreign school which she had been told was that of a saint. A saint, she thought, must be a foreign god. At the time she had wished her country's gods were nicer to look at. She would have liked very much to have put the foreign saint in a picture, but of course that would have been sacrilegious. But here was a brow as beautiful as that foreign saint's. All over its smooth surface were written the words, "I serve humanity." Tu Hee was spellbound.

Weng Toy watched well-pleased the expression on his child's face. He had studied her too many years not to be able to read it like a printed page,

and he knew Paul Culver had already touched a heart-string.

In a reverie Tu Hee held the book out to her guardian.

"He is a young mandarin, Uncle Weng? Or a prince, maybe?"

"He is my sister's child."

"But how comes he to be in English garb? And if he is my cousin, why have I never before heard of him?"

"It is a painful story, child; at least painful to me. That is why I have not before mentioned it to you. My nephew was adopted by an American doctor. His grandfather, who is now dead, permitted it through misplaced gratitude, as the foreigner had saved his life. I have not seen the child since he was a baby, but a friend of mine, Tung Yung, has kept a close watch, and through him I have learned that my sister's son has had all the culture America is capable of bestowing, and his Chinese blood has enabled him to capture the greatest honors of Europe."

"Honors, you say, Uncle?"

"Yes; did you not read?"

As Tu Hee confessed the face had held all her attention, Weng Toy read: "Lieutenant Paul Culver, adopted son of Dr. Neil Culver of New York, who has been awarded the highest honors of France and Great Britain, the Croix de Guerre and the Victoria Cross. China has also expressed

her pride and esteem of her young countryman by conferring on him the famous sacred ruby of the Chow dynasty. The jewel has not swerved from its natural course, however, as the young hero is a direct descendant of the Emperor Woo Wang himself."

"How wonderful!" breathed Tu Hee, her eyes shining, and then, meeting her guardian's glance, the realization of why the picture had been shown her rushed over her. She turned wide and startled eyes on her uncle. She had looked upon the picture in delight, claiming the young hero as one of her own blood, one of her own noble house, yes, as the brother that had been denied her. Bewildered, she clasped and unclasped her hands. There was confusion and a note of pleading in her voice when she spoke:

"But he is my cousin, Uncle Weng."

Weng Toy laid aside the book. He replied calmly and evenly as if making an unchallengable statement: "He is my nephew, but for reasons which I cannot now disclose, child, that fact would not prevent a closer alliance."

"You mean, Uncle Weng, you really wish me to marry—"

Weng Toy lifted his hand. "I wish only for your happiness, my child. It would please me only if it pleased you."

But the words brought no relief to Tu Hee. It seemed that the inevitable was submerging her

will power. A strange thing had happened. A problem had entered her life which she must solve for herself and by herself. Bending towards her guardian Tu Hee brushed his forehead with her lips and ran from the room.

CHAPTER VII

IT WAS the night Captain Marsden was to dine at the mandarin's. Tu Hee's cheeks glowed until they matched the tints of the gown that Lun was fastening so proudly.

"You grow more like your mother every day," conceded the old nurse, standing back and surveying her charge with head on one side.

"Ah, tell me about her, Lun, dear. You and Uncle Weng speak of my dear mother so seldom, and to think I haven't even a picture of her. I suppose, though, she was gentle and obedient and loved the husband her parents chose for her?"

Lun had become suddenly busy with the trinkets on the dressing table. When Tu Hee paused she nodded and spoke in the quick, nervous way she had when excited. "Yes, yes, madam love husband much, great much, Misse Tu Hee."

"O, Lun, how I envy those gentle, willowy-backed creatures who pass us in their rickshaws with downcast eyes, waiting for their greatest joys in life, a husband and a son."

"Ah!" There was a hopeful note in Lun's voice. "You envy. You too want husband and son?"

"No, I envy their pliant natures, Lun dear. I

know if uncle should ever force me to marry I should tear my husband's eyes out and then run away. Poor dear Uncle Weng, I'm afraid he doesn't yet know the little demon the gods left on his hands; although," and here Tu Hee's voice became softly reminiscent, "I believe I could almost adore Paul Culvert."

"Eh?" Lun turned so quickly that the box of rouge flew out of her hand, half of it lodging down her neck and the other half on the top of Tu Hee's head.

"Scampering mice!" ejaculated Tu Hee, peering anxiously in the glass at her brightly powdered coiffure. "Shimmering fish scales! Lun, what have you done? And dinner in five minutes. Quick—dust me. You know how uncle links murder with dinner waiting." While she was talking Tu Hee was dusting and knocking furiously at the red powder, which seemed to be getting redder and spreading with every flap of the handkerchief. "The God of Speed be with you, Lun. Hurry."

Lun forced her wringing hands apart, but after fruitless efforts to dislodge the bright color, she resorted to artifice. Unwinding one of the long strands she drew it over the top of Tu Hee's head, giving the appearance of an ebony coronet.

Catching her reflection in the long mirror, Tu Hee clapped her hands. "You're a witch, Lun. You've made me two inches taller, and when I carry my head so, Uncle Weng will not dare to even look a scold from the corner of his eye."

“ Yes, that hair dress does suit. But Missee Tu Hee, what you know about Paulee Culver? ”

“ Why surely, Lun, you don’t need to be told any part of the family history? ”

“ No.” Lun’s hands went together. “ Well? ”

“ Don’t you know he’s uncle’s nephew—my cousin and—” But at this point Tu Hee paused.

“ But if you don’t know, perhaps—”

“ Course I knowee all—but how you know? ” Then fearing she had committed herself, the woman added quickly: “ Master no like velly much to speak.”

“ Ah, but it’s different now, Lunnee dear. He is a great man. Has won wonderful honors in Europe and the Chow dynasty ruby has been conferred on him.”

“ You say so?—True? ” The woman’s eyes had become like round black beads. The dark skin of her cheeks folded together and a chuckle came from her open mouth.

“ Yes, isn’t it wonderful? ” Tu Hee, who for the first time in her life missed her nurse’s finishing touch to her toilet, was giving the final pat to her dignified coiffure herself.

“ Little Paul,” muttered the Chinese woman. “ The gods tookee care then.”

From the doorway Tu Hee turned and looked at her curiously, but whatever question was on her lips remained unsaid for at that minute the big clock in the hall chimed eight, so tucking away her curiosity she flew from the room.

As she sped down the hall towards the drawing-room voices reached her from the mandarin's study. She paused, puzzled that her uncle should treat his foreign guest so informally as to have him in his private apartment. She slipped behind the heavy drapery to recover her poise after her undignified haste, and was amazed to hear Chu Sing's voice coming from the room, muffled but angry.

"Broad, you call yourself? You are binding yourself with foreign chains in permitting that girl to dine openly with a foreign devil. You call her life freedom. I call it a damn disgrace. She will have no modesty left in a year's time with such training."

Weng Toy's reply came back low and tense. Tu Hee clasped her hands nervously. Only once before had she heard that note in her guardian's voice, once when he had caught a slave beating a woman.

"You are a drunken man and not responsible, or I would choke the breath out of you."

The other's voice wavered until it was almost a pleading whine. "I suppose you would consent to her marriage with the foreign devil?"

Tu Hee did not realize she was eavesdropping. The knowledge that she was the pivot of the conversation magnetized her to the spot. She held her breath now for the denial she expected to be forthcoming.

"And why not? She is but a gift to China!"

Tu Hee's head swam. She grasped the edge of the door to steady herself. What did Uncle Weng mean? Was he disowning his own blood? She made a step forward to confront him, when the derisive laugh of Chu Sing sent her shuddering back, and she listened tensely, fearing she knew not what.

“A gift—a gift of the gods!”

Tu Hee's heart gave a throb of relief. She wanted to throw herself forward laughing for joy, so great was the relaxation that swept over her, but instead she stepped out into the hallway and proceeded towards the drawing-room, her head high, a true mandarin's niece and daughter of heathen China.

David Marsden, whose artistic eye had been trying to regulate his impatient heart and failing miserably, crossed eagerly to meet the bewildering vision that entered the room. For six days he had been delving assiduously into Chinese etiquette, but now stood forgetful of it all, aware only of the ecstasy of being able to gaze again into a pair of eyes the blueness of which had brought back a little of God's sunshine into his broken life.

“My uncle has been detained, Captain Marsden, by an unexpected caller,” explained Tu Hee, as she gave him her hand. “I am sure he regrets keeping you waiting, for Uncle Weng is punctuality itself.”

“The time flies so rapidly in this interesting room I didn't even know I had been kept waiting,”

reassured David, obeying her motion to be seated.

“This interests you?” David fidgeted under the quizzical look in the blue eyes and wondered if she were laughing at him. He decided she was when she continued naively: “Please don’t say it looks unusual to you. We like to think this room is tolerably foreign in appearance. I know Uncle Weng had that object in view when he furnished it.”

It was with a decided effort David made himself agreeable with light talk, an entirely new experience for him when with the fair sex. His admiration for the Eastern maiden was growing by leaps and bounds. Her poise and self-confidence in comparison with her years astonished him. She couldn’t possibly, he decided, be more than eighteen, and how lovely she looked, like some rare, delicate, exotic flower with a peculiar refinement all her own! Why didn’t English women wear gowns that rippled like pink rose vines down to slippers as dainty as buds?

“If you are really interested in what we of the East consider beauty, Captain Marsden—”

David endeavoured to get a firm and equal grip on his two senses, hearing and seeing. It required great effort, though. Yes, her voice, he decided, equalled her other points. It was soft, and almost lazy in its nonchalance, yet was saved from monotony or drawl by an almost American alertness that rounded off each word.

Tu Hee paused in the middle of a sentence.

“But perhaps I am presumptuous in supposing you are interested in us. After all, your mission in our country, I understand, is not voluntary.”

“Indeed, Miss Weng Toy, the East has fascinated me from childhood. If I appear distraught and absent-minded I assure you it is not indifference. It is rather that, please pardon me for what may seem abruptness to your Eastern training, you are a very unusual young lady.”

But Tu Hee was not at all affronted. Her lips parted in an alluring smile and she leaned towards him eagerly. “Do you really think me that? Do I seem at all nice to your foreign eyes? O Captain Marsden, if you only knew how I’ve been envying the smiling creatures on your magazine covers for the past week! And that pretty young lady—Mrs. Claymore told me she is your cousin—you find me interesting after her?—what word shall I use?—ah yes, vivacious company?”

As David looked into the eager eyes and listened to the pent-up thoughts rolling out from one who a few moments before had all the *savoir-faire* of a woman of the world, he again experienced the pleasurable thrill of meeting at last an antidote for his hitherto ennui, his world-weariness.

But their *tête-à-tête* was over all too soon. As footsteps came along the hall David was surprised at the lightning change in his companion. The animation died from her face and in an instant she was the calm hostess with duties to perform. He decided it wasn’t deceit. Indeed, it puzzled

him to fathom the reason. Dual natures he had heard and read of, but this was his nearest personal approach to anything of the kind, and he wondered if it were a mere fancy that the East and West were fighting for supremacy in this winsome and fascinating find of his!

After Weng Toy had made ample apologies for his delay, the three proceeded to the dining-room, where the arts of the mandarin's cooks had provided a feast fit for kings. This was David's first experience of dining in a Chinese home. He had heard, however, that it was customary in China, and a sign of good-breeding, to extol the food to the highest point, while the host did the reverse. The delicious first course of fruit and nuts, followed by gelatinous birds' nest soup, worked his enthusiasm up to a fine pitch, nor did it require any effort to eulogize on the shark's fins which followed. Indeed, David had had no idea food could be raised so far above the commonplace of life, but then never before had he had such a charming hostess, who considered it an unavoidable courtesy to taste from his dish at intervals, a custom he thought quite charming. Weng Toy, however, although his dinner and manner of serving it were truly Chinese, did not follow the denunciatory custom of his country. Instead, he guided skillfully a friendly and delightful conversation.

Although David decided that that evening was the real bend in the turning-point in his life, he

couldn't determine which was the more captivating — the girl whose confidences had bubbled up so spontaneously in the drawing-room, or the young hostess, demure yet dignified, whose laugh had simmered into a smile and whose long lashes were lifted at but rare intervals to let him glimpse the glowing sapphires they concealed.

After dinner Tu Hee slipped away. David discussed with his host absent mindedly, but at least intelligently, the world topics of the day. He soon discovered here was another rare curio of friendship with which fate had favoured him. He was enchanted with the mandarin's wide views, his respect and tolerance of the opinions of others, the diffidence but, when urged, the firmness, with which he voiced his own convictions, letting it be seen, however, they were leashed and not allowed to run wild.

When eleven-thirty came and still Tu Hee had not reappeared, David, successfully hiding his disappointment, rose to take his departure.

The mandarin looked at him in surprise. "Is it necessary that you cut short your visit, Captain Marsden?" he enquired. Upon learning that his guest had no paramount reason for departing at so early an hour as eleven-thirty, Weng Toy settled back in his chair and motioned David to do the same.

David discovered his host had done some extensive travelling, and as he himself had covered not an insignificant part of the world's territory, they

compared some very interesting notes. From the arts of Rome they wandered to the antiquities of Egypt, thence to the jungles of Africa.

“ You undoubtedly have a valuable assortment of souvenirs of your travels, Mr. Weng Toy? ”

“ Yes, not a mean collection at all. They are a little step from here in a back compartment of the compound. If you would care to see them, however — ”

Interrupting him, David assured the mandarin that while it would give him no small pleasure to have old memories revived, he would much prefer, if his host would so humour him, to see the treasures of China, of which he had heard his palace was a veritable storehouse.

Weng Toy's manner showed he was not a little pleased at the request, and while deprecating in true Chinese fashion his limited possessions, at once proceeded to gratify his guest's curiosity.

The scent of flowers filled the summer night air as David crossed the compound with his host. A full moon sailed in the sky, bathing the courtyard in a silver radiance. Tiny stone bridges glimmered white over waterfalls that splashed and cooled the atmosphere. Dotted here and there were rock gardens from which the flowers glowed softly and drowsily in the night breeze. Mountains of peonies rose like eager, flaming heralders, beckoning the world-weary to pause and rest. After all the tumult of the past three years no wonder David named it the Garden of Peace.

“What a wonderful, perfect setting!” he exclaimed, and then stopped. For a moment he had fancied himself walking here, a small hand resting in his and blue eyes returning shyly his adoring glances. He sighed. His life had been, and would continue to be, too incongruous for such happiness. The cold hand of Fate would forever bar the way, for love as madly as he would, he could never marry a Chinese maiden. Such an act on his part would be like taking one of the glowing peonies before him and bruising its life out. No, he would behave sanely and rationally, accompany his host, admire the treasures of China, and say good-bye to the place forever. In all fairness he must turn back at the first step.

They had come to a dividing wall. Weng Toy pushed open a moon gate and they entered another courtyard equally as beautiful. The mandarin led the way into one of the many small buildings comprising his estate. Inside David stood bewildered. The oriental splendour of the place dazzled him. Draperies and hangings and wonderfully carved furniture, appearing too exquisite for human use, surrounded him. Ebony couches, made luxuriant with brocaded cushions, were strewn about the apartment invitingly. Teakwood chairs and tables, with covers on which the emblems of China were embroidered in pure gold, made the place luxuriant enough for the abode of princes.

The mandarin watched the expressive face of

his guest well pleased. "This room thousands of years old," he explained. "Everything before you belonged to my famous ancestor, the Emperor Woo Wang."

"I have travelled a great deal, Mr. Weng Toy, but you have here a room that surpasses in beauty and luxury anything I have ever seen. You keep it closed up, of course? You do not make use of it?"

"My niece is the only one privileged to come here. This is one of her own private rooms. Nothing in all China too good for my child."

The note of earnest solemnity in the last statement forged a true link of esteem in David's mind for this high-bred Easterner.

As he stood in the midst of these symbols of an aeons-old civilization, David could not help but ponder on this country, with its teeming millions who were yet rivetted in the footsteps of their ancestors. What would happen, he wondered, when the fetters were broken and they were forced to meet the new world, the West, which in comparison, was an infant in years and harbored barbarians when China lolled in luxury?

As the door of the treasure house closed on them, Weng Toy paused.

"There is something I am going to show you, Captain Marsden, that no foreigner has yet laid eyes on, the most prized possession of my house and one which I know you will appreciate."

David expressed his keen pleasure at the offer,

but added it must surely be one of the seven wonders of the world if it could surpass what he had already seen.

They passed through several courtyards, each vying with the other in beauty. The air seemed to grow more and more fragrant. Fountains fell in cool rhythmical splashes, and temple bells chimed softly in the night breeze. Truly it was a world by itself — a world loaded with years and enchantment. After following a winding path bordered with flowering bushes they came upon a temple rising serenely like a saintly sentinel guarding the past, the pagoda roof shimmering in the moonlight.

At their approach, two servants, standing on guard at the door, prostrated themselves to the ground. Weng Toy passed between them, and David followed. It was all rather weird. What did it mean, he wondered, guards at this time of night in front of a temple? Surely they did not fear for the safety of their gods. David smiled at the incongruity of the thought, the necessity for humans to protect the symbols of their deities. Inside the entrance two more guards bowed themselves to the ground.

The temple was but dimly lighted as they entered, but almost immediately a soft glow permeated the place and David became aware of a circular formation of servants around a huge idol in the centre of the temple. He watched them curiously, wondering what there was about this pagan

religion to call forth such devoutness, and evidently midnight worship was quite customary. At least, the mandarin showed no surprise. But were they worshipping, after all? he asked himself. Their attitude was by no means prayerful. Solemn it was but not reverent. Besides, the group were facing the door and had been when their master entered, for no movement had they made except to prostrate themselves at the mandarin's approach. Rising en masse they now formed a single file on each side of the idol, and Weng Toy fell into step with his guest and together they approached the image.

A sense of the mystic crept over David as he stood before the statue. The soft lights from the candles, the aroma of burning incense, and the mellow chimes of the temple bells as the night breeze swayed them, all tended to envelop him with a sense of the unreal, the supernatural. In the shadowy temple the image might have been a reincarnated spirit, so lifelike did it appear. The delicate colourings showed the features up in startling relief. This was no dull, stolid-faced idol. The tranquil expression led David's thoughts to the Nazarene, and it indeed seemed that the Christ was in that Chinese temple, tolerant and patient with a blindfolded world. A feeling, almost a conviction, swept over David that if he but knelt there for a brief moment, some wonderful blessing would fall on him from the slender, upraised hand.

A flood of brilliant light suddenly enveloped the head of the image, and on the alabaster whiteness of the brow glowed a patch of red, dazzling in its intensity. The spot grew, spread, and glowed full, a veritable fountain of radiating crimson.

David's eyes were magnetized. He subconsciously derided himself for allowing his nerves to play a trick on him. The weirdness of the surroundings still had its clutch on him, but it was more than mysticism now. It was the beauty of the lustrous object on the forehead of the idol that drew him with such imperious force.

The mandarin's voice brought him back to reality. "As you gaze on the God of Humanity, my friend, I note on your face that which pleases me, a look of, yes, reverence."

David pulled himself together. "Your God of Humanity, sir, resembles very much our God of Humanity, the Christ."

"Indeed. Ah well, it is my opinion that at the root the religions of the world are about the same. Our hearts instinctively go out to a God. Perhaps we call Him by different names, as we name our children, but the divine element is there, just as the human is in the other, and reaches the same, the one Divinity. But," continued the Chinaman, "it is not for the purpose of discussing the faiths of the world that I brought you here tonight, my friend. On the contrary, it is something very human."

As he spoke Weng Toy pressed a hidden spring,

causing part of the bronze railing surrounding the statue, to swing back, through which opening he stepped, motioning David to follow him.

“What I am about to show you has never been disclosed to a foreigner before. You are the first outside of Chinese walls to enter this temple, except—” Weng Toy broke off abruptly. David had the feeling that his host had inadvertently come near to betraying himself on a subject which was never far from his mind. The Oriental wheeled about as abruptly as he had broken off his sentence. He looked at David keenly. “I know not why I have brought you, a foreigner, one might say a perfect stranger, into this sacred spot to-night. But you seem not a stranger to me, Captain Marsden, but rather a friend, who in some way is to be connected with my life. Our souls have perhaps met before. Do you believe that could be? It may be that we two have traversed this planet together in some bygone age—that a cord, an indissoluble tie then connected us, which is to be strengthened before we leave these bodies again. Or perhaps an injustice was enacted to one of us by the other and we now meet that the wrong may be righted.”

As Weng Toy paused, David felt that a tense moment had arrived. It suddenly appeared the most natural thing in the world for him to be standing in that Chinese temple half an hour after midnight listening to a brief exposition on reincarnation. A low chanting sounded from the

shadowy depths of the temple. The silvery notes of the bells swaying in the night breeze accompanied in strange but sweet contrast the human voices. The burning incense still scattered its subtle essence in soothing, tranquilizing exhalations. It seemed to David a fitting period for his life to stand still in the swiftly moving wheel of existence. A strange inexplicable feeling swept over him that he had been waiting, existing for just this scene. How long would the act last, he wondered. Would the curtain drop, finally closing out from his vision a form, the mere thought of which caused his blood to tingle with fresh life? But cold reality started its dread creep through his brain at that point. It bade him awake, to leave his fool's paradise, for the East and the West could not meet. Their destiny was to recede one from the other. The practical, sane side of him was within reach at last. His brain was once more clear and collected and his heart normal and level as he watched his host slide back a panel in the pedestal of the image.

A click sounded overhead. David raised his eyes in time to see the crimson brightness disappear from the alabaster-like brow of the statue. He turned in amazement to the mandarin, but Weng Toy was working at something in the aperture of the pedestal. A thin gold wire flashed in his hand and the snapping of a spring into place cut through the soft, muffled sounds of the place.

Weng Toy arose, an eager look on his face, and

something red flashed from the hand he reached towards David.

David bent forward. An exclamation escaped him as he peered into the brilliant, scintillating depths of an immense ruby.

"There is only one other equal to it in the world," confided the mandarin.

David's eyes wandered from the jewel to the head of the image, where now in place of the red light loomed a dense shadow.

"This stone," continued Weng Toy, "has been handed down through my line from the time of Woo Wang. I repeat, there is one other as magnificent, an exact counterpart, a twin. The Prince Tsoo, my cousin, had it in his keeping but it will soon be—if it is not already—in the possession of my nephew."

"A lucky chap, Mr. Weng Toy. I have seen numerous rare jewels, but never did I believe such perfect beauty existed in a stone until now. This, I presume, accounts for the strong guard you have here?"—and David glanced around at the forms in the shadows of the temple.

"Yes, a guard of thirty men is posted here day and night. They retire only to be replaced by thirty more."

As he lifted the jewel from the extended hand of the mandarin, it seemed to David the warm lights flashing forth from the stone radiated by-gone life. It was as if thoughts that had never

died, living ties with the innumerable dead, the brave men of the Chow dynasty, were still clinging to that pulsating piece of antiquity.

Across the brilliant surface of the stone, in cameo-like relief, was an inscription in delicate Chinese script.

"This is perhaps the motto of your house, Mr. Weng Toy?" questioned David.

The mandarin shook his head. "That is a sacred inscription. The meaning in your language, Captain Marsden, is The All Seeing Eye."

"You have here a wonderful treasure, Mr. Weng Toy. I presume your niece will eventually become the proud possessor of this sacred relic?"

Weng Toy hesitated. His voice was very tender when he spoke. "If it were in my power, my little girl should have the jewel, but for reasons which I may not explain, it cannot be. If we deviate from the will of the gods tragedy is sure to follow."

"And you say a duplicate of this stone has descended to your nephew?"

"Yes, a nephew who in spite of the blood of kings in his veins, has existed on foreign ideals. I fear very much the outcome of it all."

"Your house is a broad-minded one, Mr. Weng Toy, to permit a descendant to be educated abroad, which I presume is what you mean. May I enquire if he has been to a European school?"

"American," replied the mandarin dryly and briefly.

“Indeed?” Quickened interest was in David’s tone.

“My sister died when the child was a babe, and through a stupid blunder—the child’s grandfather on his father’s side misnamed it gratitude—he was handed over to an American physician. The foreigner and his wife left for America immediately after. You know, of course, the outcome.” Weng Toy shrugged his shoulders half philosophically, half disdainfully. “I have no fault to find with American training,” he added. “A fine people, very fine, but it was a blow to me—my own sister’s son and a remarkable child.”

David leaned forward eagerly. “Is this nephew of yours in France now, Mr. Weng Toy?”

The mandarin’s face brightened and then sobered. “Yes. He has won great distinctions. That is the reason the twin jewel has been conferred on him.”

“He is well worthy of it,” exclaimed David. “I know him, in fact have gone over the top with him—have seen him laugh in the very face of death. Paul Culver is a wonderful lad—nay, man.”

Weng Toy drew closer as David blurted out his enthusiastic praise. “You know him? Paul Culver? Yes, that is his foreign name. His god-given name is Hing Kwong. You have faced death by his side? Ah, I saw it in your face, Captain Marsden. Listen. Over this sacred stone I swear you have my fidelity forever.” With the words Weng

Toy knelt on the temple floor, pressed his forehead against the ruby in David's hand and uttered a few words slowly and impressively. They were in Chinese, but David knew the solemnity with which they were spoken betokened an oath.

He had intended reassuring the mandarin on his nephew's American upbringing, adding the pleasing information that he was an old friend of Paul's foster-parents, but at that moment chimes pealed out. A swishing of garments and soft pattering of feet sounded and in filed a column of men.

Weng Toy rose. The ruby was reattached to the gold wire and in a moment was glowing in its alabaster setting. The guard had lined up inside the temple and bowed themselves to the ground as the mandarin and David passed out.

After partaking of tea in the big reception hall, David took his departure. Weng Toy consented to part with him at such an early hour as two a.m., only on the understanding that he would make a second visit very soon.

As David sped into the night in the mandarin's modern up-to-date car, the Oriental's sacred oath of friendship, the brave deeds of gallant young Culver, yes, even the ruby in the temple, faded to insignificance in the memory of a pair of smiling blue eyes. Alas, for his Spartan resolutions of the evening—the romance of the East was fast absorbing them.

CHAPTER VIII

“DAVID, when we leave this meshwork of a Peking thoroughfare I’m going to give full rein to my Mongol. If I don’t, by the time we reach Culvers’ temple in the hills every ounce of self-confidence will have evaporated. There’s nothing like stony silence to give one the creeps.”

“I beg your pardon, Grace.” David managed to navigate his pony through a medley of carts, a lunch vendor’s equipment, and a couple of rickshaws, and reach his cousin’s side. “I wonder what would happen if some of the New World energy were to suddenly lodge in half the population of China?”

“Headlong and sidelong collision, no doubt. Right of way being unknown, there would be a general smash-up, and Peking would gasp out its last on its own streets. Look, would you! What do you think of that for nonchalant stupidity?—if there could be such a thing?”

David followed his companion’s gaze. Three donkey riders and half a dozen carts, overtopped by two camels, had met from four directions. As no right of way regulation existed, no one thought of allowing the other to pass, consequently the medley were all crowding closer and closer and

making more inevitable a hopeless tangle. But might and dignity saved the day. The camels moved forward stately and invincible. The others stepped aside and, behold, a way was cleared.

"Three cheers for the kings of the desert!" laughed Grace, as her pony bore her through the clearing made by the camels. "Poor old China," she commented as David reached her side again, "she finds the Old World chains hard to break."

"And yet her people aren't so different from us," replied David reminiscently.

"Listen to the boy! I won't deny they have muscles, a tongue, and even eyes, but so have monkeys. But even monkeys have a little sense of cleanliness."

"Now, now, dear girl, you are leaving out the soul part."

"Their souls are so covered up with layers of antiquity one seldom gets a glimpse of them."

"That may be the case with some, but even China has her shining examples of humanity. Mr. Weng Toy, for instance; a more intelligent, refined gentleman would be hard to find even in Europe or America."

"Indeed!" A dimple showed in Grace's cheek. Turning her head she became suddenly interested in the other side of the street.

"You haven't met him, of course," continued David.

"I have his niece, though."

David straightened in his saddle. Grace felt in-

dignant eyes boring into the back of her head and the dimple increased to two.

“Perhaps”—David’s voice was decidedly cool—“I mistake the meaning in your words and tone, Grace. Unless my memory is decidedly unreliable, not long ago I heard you sing exuberant praises of Miss Weng Toy.”

“Well,” Grace’s tone was tantalizing, “can’t one’s mind change? I haven’t seen her since, and I’m beginning to think that in my first judgment I was mistaken.”

“No you weren’t,” denied David, heatedly. “She is the fairest thing China or any other country could produce, a pure lotus lily.”

Grace turned quickly. The dimples had fled.

David flushed as he met the grave question in his cousin’s eyes. “Well?” There was a note of defiance in his voice.

Grace’s eyes grew soft as she noticed the tense lines in his face. “I suspected this, David, and was going to ask you to be fair to the girl, but I see you, too, are going to suffer.”

“Suffer? Why should either of us suffer?” David’s voice was almost irritable.

“You would marry her, then?”

“Why not, if she loves me?”

“Yes, love is a great power, a great panacea in most women’s lives; but forgive me, David, I don’t think even your love would make little Tu Hee happy. What is more, I know you agree with me, David.”

David's head was bent. Grace grew uncomfortable at the silence that ensued. Had she said too much?—presumed on her relationship and friendship? Had she proclaimed her convictions without tact? A little frightened, she turned. She must say something to break this horrible silence. David was gazing straight ahead, his lips set in hard, firm lines. Reaching out a hand she laid it rather timidly on his saddle.

David looked at her, then covering her hand with his own, he said: "You are right, Grace. I have argued with myself until I have almost broken my own will, but, thank heaven, my love for her is too great to let me see my own shadow where her happiness is concerned."

"I am sure she is as much Western as Eastern in her make-up. Her eyes proclaim that." Grace seemed to be searching for a loophole for her cousin. "But against her Eastern education and her love for her own people, I'm afraid the Western strain would weaken to nothing."

David did not reply, but words were unnecessary. The shadow on his face affirmed he agreed with her.

Mechanically Grace guided her pony from a break in the road, as she pondered over the cruel prongs of fate. War-weary and battle-scarred, the man at her side was yet destined for wounds; for David, Grace knew, was one of the men who love well once in a lifetime. Why, she asked herself,

did life make such a hopeless scrawl of some lives? She sighed heavily.

“What’s this I hear?” David forced his voice to a banter. “Your friendship, nay, kinship, is the boon of my life—my salvation. With that I am ‘Fortunate Youth’ No. 2, so don’t waste your heavens of regret on me, fair lady. By the way, I have a little secret up my left sleeve, which I’ll wager you a box of Ma-Hi’s confectionery you can’t guess.”

They were now ascending a hill, and Grace, who was ahead on the narrow path, trusted fully to her horse’s instinct for life and limb, while she turned to glimpse her cousin’s face.

“Might have known I could gain nothing from your crinkly, twinkly mask,” she pouted; “but let me see—left sleeve he says, h’m. What’s on the left? A heart. Your box of sweets is safe, Davey dear. I know of nothing or no him that can rock my heart. Even Rowe, who swore he would drill through the stone, has given up. For awhile he did honor me with weekly epistles which dwindled to fortnightly, then to monthly, and now, alas, to nil. I only know the creature exists through Mabel Hespeler, who persists in lecturing me about his broken heart. It’s terrible to be disillusioned, Davey dear.” Grace’s dimples showed bravely, nay, rougishly, but David was not deceived.

“This is the part of China one hopes will never change: the mountains, the valleys, and the tem-

ples. I wonder, David, if the Culvers have taken the same temple where their child died years ago? ”

“ I hardly think so. No; in fact I now recall Uncle Chess writing that that temple had been removed.”

“ How strange! I didn’t think the Chinese ever did away with their temples, above all things. Ah, David, isn’t that lovely? ” Grace pointed excitedly to the grove at the top of the hill, through the green of which glimmered a red-tiled roof with upturned corners. “ How I wish mother would take a temple for the summer months; but she says she is far enough removed from civilization as it is, through me, as if it is my wish to be banished to heathendom for the sake of empty romance. Why, David, there’s a man!—he looks as if he were waiting for us.”

“ Well, my dear, there is nothing strange in that, as Dr. Culver and Uncle Chess both happen to be males.”

“ Of course.” Grace relaxed in her saddle. “ How foolish of me. I thought for a moment it might be—” But her explanation was left unfinished, for at that instant a cheery halloo floated down to them.

David, his eyes flashing mischief, watched his companion’s face. But Grace had apparently forgotten his very existence. As the clear, long-drawn notes continued, unbelief, surprise, pleasure, and hesitation commingled on her flushed face.

The last, however, disappeared almost as suddenly as it had come, and she urged her pony forward at a gait that is an insult to a Chinese beast, especially when the road winds up a none too gently sloping hillside. As she gained the top she was caught in a pair of strong young arms, in fact so strong that they were not in the least hurry to get rid of their burden.

“You may hold me just another second, Rowe,” came a smothered voice. “David will be here then.”

But David had discreetly taken another path.

The moon beams down in the same silvery way on China as on America. The same fatal or rather fateful consequences follow in its wake, also, but the happy word bliss was predominant to-night.

“Say it again, sweetheart. It is so wonderful to hear it coming from you—you whom I thought Fate had ruthlessly put out of my reach forever.”

“It’s surprising what a teacher distance is, almost as efficient as experience.” And the girl sighed happily. “When did you discover you couldn’t live without me, Rowe?”

“The instant I laid eyes on you,” was the prompt reply. “I won’t ask you that question, dearest, for I had nothing to attract you but my love.”

“Sh!” The girl laid her fingers on the boy’s lips. “I won’t have you disparage yourself. The germ was there, the bud I mean, but mamma nearly froze it to death until I—well, I almost felt I had

no heart at all. But oh ! let's forget all that now. I don't want to even think, this wonderful night."

"What's that?" questioned the boy as the sound of a man singing floated out to them.

"It's David, the wretch," laughed Grace. "He has the victrola on the edge of the verandah for our benefit."

Clear, resonant, the music poured forth, drowning the silver notes of the temple bells.

"Oh, was there ever a night like this

When all the world seems a song of bliss !"

"That's a clarion call," laughed Grace.

"Hang it all. I can't have you to myself for five minutes."

"Time flies, I know, Rowe dear, but my wrist watch tells me we have been out here exactly forty-five minutes."

As the boy and girl walked towards the lantern-lit verandah Grace pressed her companion's arm. "O Rowe, I'm so glad you came. I was so desperate; yes, desperate enough to fall in love with David !"

The boy's eyes sought her face jealously.

Grace laughed. "You needn't have the tiniest twinge of that green malady, Rowe dear. David has a romance, but," and Grace's voice became grave, "poor David, I'm afraid there is no living happy, ever after attached to it."

"It's not a painted Chinese lady, I hope?"

Grace nodded.

"H'm, risky business, playing in the celestial

region. I thought Dave was more level-headed."

"It's not playing, Rowe."

"Good heavens!" Rowe stopped up short.

"You don't mean to say he's thinking of marrying a Chinese—a yellow-skin?"

"You don't understand. This girl is different. She is wonderfully pretty for a Chinese. She is a direct descendant of the royal house of Woo Wang—a lady to her finger tips."

"They tip a long way too, don't they?"

"Rowe, how can you be so horrid? If that's their custom—"

"Oh, I'm not criticizing their aversion to manicuring. Only I'll warn Dave to see that at least her nails are cut. It's not safe you know; some of them have such beastly tempers."

"If it wasn't such a glorious night, I believe I'd quarrel with you. This girl, I tell you, is different."

"For the love of skipping grasshoppers, she's trying to palm poor Dave off on an almond-eyed Oriental!"

Rowen Langton was by no means a family-tree man, but he had the not unusual narrow viewpoint of the average Westerner with regard to those outside the pale of his horizon. Good natured to a degree, his Southern dogma was all-white or a mongrel.

"Oh, I know it seems terrible," replied Grace, "perfectly horrible, to think of David, dear old David, having this happen after going through so

much, but I don't blame him, can't even wonder at it. If I were a man I know I'd flop in like a young whale. I saw her only once, but I fell for her loveliness like a pilgrim before his altar. Her eyes are wonderful—the bluest I've ever seen."

"Blue? Blue-black, you mean?"

"No, sapphire blue. I think her grandmother, or somebody way back, was white. David said something to that effect."

"Worse and more of it. From what I hear I think we had all better part company from your cousin if we want to keep our scalps."

"Rowe, don't be absurd, or I'll—"

"No, you won't, sweetheart. I'll stand right by—get right into the fray, if you say the little word."

"When you see her you may want to get in too far. Gracious, it sounds as if the whole assemblage are on the verandah."

"Well, what if they are?" whispered the boy, as they climbed the steps. "I feel as if I want to tell it to the whole world!"

As they stepped on to the verandah, however, it was rather a serious group they faced. Neil Culver was the centre of it, and Chesterton Reynolds was speaking.

"It is said that nothing in this old world is perfect, but that belies the adage. And the old mandarin has an exact duplicate, David?"

"Yes, sir. If it were not for the inscription I would take it for the identical stone."

“It’s the sacred ruby, Paul’s gift from Prince Tsoo,” whispered Grace, as they joined the enraptured group. “O Rowe, isn’t it the most perfect, gorgeous thing in the world!” exclaimed Grace, as she glimpsed the glowing jewel of China.

Neil Culver lifted the little case towards her, but to the surprise of everyone she drew back, pale to the lips. In a moment she had recovered herself, but her voice trembled slightly as she spoke: “Perhaps you will think me silly, imaginative, but when you held it out it seemed to spread and liquidize like warm blood.”

But no one laughed at Grace’s fancy. Instead, Reynolds remarked: “I’ve spent so many years in the Orient it would be strange if the occult had not influenced at least a corner of my mind, but that stone has a history, the life of which still glows from its very heart, and what David has told us of his visit to the mandarin’s temple makes me think it’s a dangerous article to have around.”

Culver flashed a look of surprise, mingled with resentment, at his friend.

The other replied to the look with a half laugh. “Thanks for your speechless compliment, Neil. Your eyes plainly tell me I was once a practical, level-headed human being. I hope I am that still, but knocking about in the world, as you know, one is bound to lose the protruding points of egotism. I used to scoff at what I termed the superstition of the East, but now I keep silent, but with mind

wide open, so that the rivulets of the unknown may saturate instead of circumvent it."

"Which I admire in you, Chess. The basis of the Christian religion is solid and firm enough to uphold any legitimate finding. But to come back to the starting-point, why do you fear the sacred ruby?"

"Yes, Mr. Reynolds, please tell us."

Irma Culver's lips were smiling as she asked the question, but the pupils of her eyes were dilated.

Reynolds looked into the wide-startled eyes for a moment, then threw back his head and laughed. His voice rang true enough to deceive the most astute as he replied: "Please forgive me, Mrs. Culver. The wonderful beauty of the stone slipped a bolt of my imagination chest. For a few moments I was living in my past among the Hindus. But this is modernized China, and the gift was made by an influential man of the East, a prince, so indeed, as Neil says, what is there to fear? Instead of fearing, I know everyone here, including myself, is thinking of the brave lad whose valour and deeds have spread so far."

A murmur of approbation rose from the group. The strained atmosphere relaxed. Mysticism evaporated before the geniality and warmth of reunited friendship, and the party set to work to enjoy the tea and cakes set before them by the head boy, while China, with its traditions and

heartaches, and encircled by its iron bands of paganism, fled before the virile, hopeful laughter of the New World.

CHAPTER IX

FOR the ensuing two weeks David worked from early morning until late into the night. He wore out completely two assistants, and then sent them to the hills for a week's rest, added an hour to his own working day and accomplished three men's work.

Grace looked on silent and fearful for the first few days, and then started in to the rescue, but all she accomplished was a shake of the head, a tightening of the lips, and the brusque query: "There are three things for me to do, Grace: work, ruin a life, or get out. Which do you advise?"

Deciding her cousin was beyond the pale of advice, Grace wisely offered none. But Fate had a card up her sleeve, which she was now ready to play.

David was sitting at his piled-up desk in the hotel. The day had been an unusually strenuous one. He had not even taken time to go to the dining-room for dinner, as the empty tray beside him indicated. A cablegram was spread open in front of him, on which he alternately frowned and beat a tattoo with his pencil. David knew perfectly well that according to all the rules of reason he ought to be in at least a genial mood, instead of

sitting there inwardly fuming. He looked once more at the official code message, although the words were already buzzing mechanically and insistently through his brain: "Report at London headquarters fifteenth September at latest. Earlier if possible."

A month previous, he reflected, such an order would have been a corner of heaven tossed to him, whereas now his only heaven lay in two blue eyes whose smiles were denied him.

"Damn! What a confounded sentimental idiot I am!" His hand shot out—the top drawer of his desk opened with a bang, and the next instant he was writing decisively a code message on the white pad headed "Cablegram": "Will leave for London Saturday, July tenth."

"Leaves me two days in which to cram ten days' work, but I've had good practice," and David laughed dryly.

His finger reached for the button on his desk, had covered it, when a tap sounded on the door, and a Chinaman in the garb of a house servant bowed himself forward. He stopped within a few paces of David's chair and glanced about apprehensively. "We alone, sir?" His voice was low and muffled, and he spoke in broken English.

"Evidently, except for the bird in the window," replied David, puzzled and a little aggravated at the man's strange manner.

The Chinaman glanced towards the cage swinging in front of the window, and emitted a grunt,

whether of satisfaction or derision David couldn't tell.

"Do you belong to the hotel?" questioned David, his voice still rasping.

The man drew himself to his full height, which was decidedly above the average. "Me hotel?" His tone expressed indignation, amazement at the foreigner's apparent ignorance and lack of etiquette.

"Well, my good man, if you don't belong here, your entrance, to say the least, is rather uncereemonious, don't you think?"

The man turned his bright beady eyes on him as if trying to comprehend the meaning of the remark. At the end of half a minute a grin parted his lips. "Ung—understand—yo ceremony, much ceremony. Sst!" The newcomer wheeled about, his startled eyes on the door. David following his glance saw the handle turn slowly and cautiously.

"What in the name—" David strode forward. "What do you mean coming here unannounced and locking my door?" He threw the question over his shoulder furiously as he turned the key and opened the door with a vicious jerk. "Well, I'll be—" The expression on his face finished the exclamation, as emptiness confronted him in the dimly lit corridor. He peered up and down the hall, but everything was still. Not even an echo disturbed the quietness. "I could have sworn that door handle moved. Hope it's not my

confounded nerves again," muttered David as he stepped back into the room. "Something bally queer—I say—" He wheeled about and received another shock. He was alone—the room was empty. David's hand went to his head. Had work and worry affected his brain?

A saucy chirp sounded from the window and in a moment the room was flooded with a joyous, full-throated melody.

"Here, here, Peko, that's too much for to-night. Enough magic around already," protested David, stepping to the bird cage, but as his glance rested on the window Peko and his carolling were forgotten. A relieved smile overspread David's face. "So that's it. It's not a pipe dream after all. The fellow was really here and took short leave through the window."

What did the strange proceeding mean? In vain he tried to find a solution. The most probable one, of course, was alien spy work. The man was a native, no doubt of it, but this meant nothing, for while China was virtually at war with Germany, there were some of her people who hated all foreigners and could not resist German gold. Perhaps a smoke would help him delve to the bottom of it. He had just settled himself in an easy chair with a cigarette, when a quick, loud knock sounded on the door.

Two strides brought David to the door, which he pulled open with such force that the caller fell

back startled. Grasping him by the collar David pulled him into the room, closed the door, and turned the key.

“What’s the meaning of this?” demanded David, holding up a curved bladed knife. To his surprise two rows of dazzling teeth showed amiably, while a relieved voice said: “Ah, you lock the door. I am safe,” and with a satisfied sigh the caller sank on to the cushioned divan.

David, undecided whether he was more amused or angry at this brazen impudence, stood contemplating him. Beyond the fact that his strange visitor was but a boy in years, he was not able to go. A soft silk cap reached well over the forehead, attached to which was a white net, which entirely concealed the eyes. As for the lower part of the face, despite the hot night, a silk scarf encircled the throat and was arranged so that only the tip of the nose and part of the mouth were revealed. The hands were hidden in the loose flowing sleeves of the dark blue coat that reached almost to the feet. The voice was hesitating, low, and very soft. It was apparent that to speak English at all was a great effort.

“Ah, it is good. To be secure is good.”

“Much obliged, I’m sure,” said David dryly. “You’ve evidently been collecting references.”

The youth sat upright. “You angry?” he questioned in surprise.

“Angry, my dear fellow, is a mild term. I am

not used to meeting these glistening objects at my door," indicating the knife, "even though they are accompanied by a charming smile."

"Ah, that to protect!"

David's heart gave a wild leap. "Who are you?" he demanded, his hand on the silken neck scarf.

"No, no. You must not touch me," cried the youth, starting to his feet, his hands going to his face in a protecting movement.

"Who are you?" David's voice trembled slightly and his hand closed over one slender wrist.

In the slight struggle the white net slipped aside and David looked into a pair of frightened, defiant eyes.

"Tu Hee! It is you then. Good God, what are you doing here? Do you know what this means?"

"Are you afraid?"

The blue eyes no longer smiled. They were as cool as the voice, but they softened a little as David replied, "Yes, for *you*."

The girl touched his sleeve. Her cheeks glowed and her voice, defiant as it was, trembled. "You guess who I am and spoil everything. You think me bold, forward like foreign girls. I so full of shame now I perhaps fail. You laugh at me."

"Dear Miss Tu Hee, I respect and care too much to do those things. If I can help you I shall consider it an honor."

The blue eyes looked at him searchingly, and, apparently satisfied, Tu Hee reached out her hand.

David clasped it as he might a child's. Indeed, she seemed but a child standing there, wide-eyed and slender in the dark, straight coat.

"I am grateful, Captain Marsden. No, I haven't time to sit down. No one knows I am here and I must get back before I am missed."

"But how did you get here? Surely you did not come alone?"

"My uncle is away for a few days and I spent the afternoon and night with an old school friend of the foreign academy. Her home is just a block away, but that is far enough." And she shivered slightly.

"You shan't return alone. I'll accompany you back."

"No, no," returned Tu Hee, "it wouldn't be safe. No one must know I have been here or even seen you tonight. You see in a case of this kind spies are everywhere. O, Captain Marsden," Tu Hee leaned forward and laid her hand on David's arm, "they are planning to steal the ruby!"

"The sacred ruby? Surely not! What is their object in taking the ruby from the temple?"

"No, no, not from the temple, from Paul Culver. I can't give you complete details," continued Tu Hee. "I do not dare to give you even the leader's name, but he will stop at nothing to accomplish

his ends. And my uncle being away makes it so terrible. They have planned to commit the crime in his absence."

"Do you know if they have set a definite time?"

"Yes, to-morrow at midnight, so you see no time is to be lost in warning your friends and protecting my cousin's possession."

"I will start for the hills at daybreak," David assured her.

"You will take a guard. You will protect yourself?"

David smiled reassuringly. "Don't bother your head about me, Miss Weng Toy. I think I can manage a common thief."

David, watching the lightning-like change of her moods, wondered that anyone should say the race was phlegmatic.

"A guard is no use, Captain Marsden." Tu Hee's voice was low and tense. "There is only one sure way of frustrating his plans, that is by encasing the ruby in the *box of death*."

David looked at her curiously. An uncanny feeling swept over him. "The name sounds rather ominous," he replied, with a half laugh.

"It is a box that was made for the protection of the twin rubies. There is not another like it in China; no, not in all the world."

"And is this death box, as you call it, within reach? Is it possible for us to procure it?" questioned David.

From the inside of her coat Tu Hee drew forth

a piece of paper, which she thrust into David's hand. "The box of death is now in the possession of Tung Yung. You will find there directions where he is to be found. I have written it so that there can be no mistake."

"This ruby means a great deal to your house, Miss Weng Toy?"

Tu Hee blushed, but smiled up at David confidentially.

"Much, yes, and much also to me. My uncle wishes my cousin and me betrothed."

"And *you*?" David tried to make his tone casual, but his heart pounded like lead as he waited for her answer.

"I? Oh!" She clasped and unclasped her hands. "I must marry. It's our custom; so I say, as does my uncle, why not Paul? He very wonderful. You marry some day, too?"

David forced a smile as he shook his head. "I'm afraid not, Miss Tu Hee."

"You say no? Ah, but great man like you should marry. You make girl very happy."

As David looked down into the earnest blue eyes, the smiles all hidden away, for the first time in his life he regretted being an Englishman. Turning away abruptly he crossed the room, pausing at his dressing-room door. There he looked back and called laughingly: "Now, Miss Tu Hee, while you fix your make-up I'll surprise you with mine!"

In less than three minutes David reappeared

in a disguise that his own mother couldn't have penetrated.

Tu Hee clapped her hands as she circled around him. "A real mandarin!" she cried.

David could not resist the temptation. Bending his head he asked softly: "Would you like me better if I *were* a mandarin?"

Tu Hee lifted laughing eyes to his face, but what she saw there caused her hands to flutter nervously. All at once she was the timid Chinese maiden and David had to bend very near to catch the tremulous answer: "You great mandarin to me always."

David and his companion made their way silently through the deserted corridors of the hotel out into the night. It was with considerable relief they saw they attracted no notice whatsoever, and congratulated themselves that they looked for all the world like two native youths of the upper class wending their way homeward after some frolic. But for all this they kept assiduously silent. Even when Tu Hee's destination was reached not even a whisper but a warm pressure of the fingers was all the means they used to communicate their thoughts to each other. David marvelled afterwards at the reserve strength that had come to his rescue and enabled him to exhibit such self-control.

As he walked back to the hotel the harassing scruples of the past ten days had entirely fled, in fact had been non-existent so far as his thoughts

were concerned. Despite the strange adventure that was but three hours ahead of him, he had no misgivings. His heart was as buoyant as his steps. His mind was mightily relaxed. If David had been inclined to analyze his feelings and put them into words, he would have perhaps diagnosed his case as one that Fate had entirely in hand. He cared to exert no volition. He was willing to be led blindly if need be. It required no thought or pondering even when he stood before his desk a short time later to destroy the cablegram he had so resolutely penned but an hour earlier. Swiftly and surely his pen filled in another blank with a code, the import of which was: "Will report in London fifteenth September. Impossible earlier."

Setting his alarm for four a.m., David settled his head on the pillow for at least two hours' rest or two hours of delightful dreams. After what seemed but five minutes of the latter he was brought back to reality by a queer sound at his bedside. His work had trained him to sleep lightly, and when he opened his eyes now he was wide awake and on the *qui vive*. To his amazement his reading lamp was already flooding him with its rays, and his servants, Ma Tu, was either chanting a prayer or moaning with pain. It was hard to tell which.

"In the name of Jupiter, what's all the row?" cried David, leaping from his bed.

"*You*, my master. I no let him in. I let him hack me but no let him in."

"Be rational, boy; what's the meaning of your standing there moaning like a banshee?" David turned the boy's face to the light and an exclamation of dismay escaped him.

"Why, Ma Tu, you're hurt! Here, sit down and stop moaning."

"I no moan," protested the boy. "I chant to gods—I save you—you—my—master!"

The last words came faintly as the boy collapsed weakly into a chair.

Quickly and deftly David tore away the garments from his servant's chest disclosing a gaping knife wound. While Ma Tu had lost a profusion of blood, David saw at a glance the stab was not serious. As he cleaned the cut the boy opened his eyes and smiled gratefully.

"Just a flesh wound, Ma Tu. When I stick you together with this adhesive plaster you'll be a whole man again. No, don't get up. I want to put some ginger into you first."

David crossed to a small cupboard in the wall, where he kept his first-aid supplies, a very necessary adjunct to his equipment. Replacing his roll of sterilized bandages and the spool of adhesive plaster he poured out some brandy.

"Here you are. Drink this and you'll forget you had a nightmare."

The boy tried to smile as he took the glass, but David noticed his hand trembled, and he doubted

greatly if his yellowish pallor was altogether the result of the gash.

“Master joke. He treat light affair of rob.” There was an accusing note in the boy’s voice.

“Ah, we feel better, eh? Well, now let’s hear the whole of this midnight hold-up.”

Ma Tu laid the empty glass on the table beside him, and in broken English unburdened his mind. There was the look of a faithful dog in the youth’s eyes as he said: “Ma Tu anxious much, anxious over master. Heard master leave room long after sleepin’ time. Got up and sat in chair so if needed Ma Tu be there. But no keep awake for sudden my eyes open—I hear noise. Jump up, shamed you come back and maybe want me. Me hurry. Carry light—open door quick. There big man stood—no foreign—Chinese he was and tight fast against your door leesening, leesening. I creep so.” Ma Tu pantomimed with his hands his cautious movements. “I make high steps on my toe nails—see, just so.”

“Yes, yes?” urged David.

“I grab him so.” Ma Tu made a swift movement with his hands through the air. “But he big man. He turn queek and I get this,” pointing with a half-shamed grin to his chest. “I back away slow, pretend afraid. He laugh low. He sneer and stand like he had me. I pray gods I save you, master. I back slow, slow to your desk. I reach behind with hand, open drawer. The gods helped—the gun was there. I laugh then. I had

him. He act coward then. He back up to window and queek like lightning before I shoot drop he out of sight."

David remained silent when Ma Tu had finished his strange story. It was clear beyond a doubt that his connection with the safe-guarding of the ruby was known. The plotters' desperation to obtain the jewel was no spineless affair when they would spill the blood of a foreigner, and that they were out for his life was a proven fact. David's ire was aroused. Their cowardice—their back hitting methods—proved them too tawdry for a white man to soil his hands with.

"There are dirty dogs in the world, eh, Ma Tu? But we'll show them a bullet's too good for them. I have you to thank for being whole at this minute, and my memory isn't short, boy."

If Ma Tu wasn't just sure of the English words, there was no mistaking the look on his master's face or the grip of his hand, and he was satisfied. His Eastern logic told him that the God of Friendship had indeed blessed him.

"And now, Ma Tu, I'll have to leave you for a few hours. The gods of fortune, or rather the goddess of everything that's wonderful and beautiful in this prosaic old world, is sending me to the hills."

"Hills? You go to hills? I go too."

David turned on the boy a look of amused surprise. The last three words were a final, unargumentative statement. David was reminded of a

stubborn bull pup who had just found out his ability to not let go. Ma Tu had risen. Resolutely he buttoned his shirt over the wound, fastened his jacket to the neck, and stood ready for his master's instructions.

"Ma Tu," David's voice was quiet but firm, "you perhaps misunderstood me. I did not say you were to accompany me. I said you were to stay here."

The boy bowed in acknowledgment of the command, and then raising a calm face, replied in a tone that betokened his mind was made up. "I obey master, yes, but I Chinese. I obey gods first. They tell me to protect master. I go to the mountains too."

David looked on in comical amazement at this logic.

"I see. Well, Ma Tu, I am placed in rather a difficult position. Seeing you kept a would-be assassin from my bedside, I presume it would be the height of ingratitude to deny your first request, or—" and David's smile dispelled the anxious, puzzled look on the boy's face—"demand. After all, perhaps the morning air will be a good bracer after the past harrowing hour. Run along. Order the ponies ready in ten minutes; but, Ma Tu, don't run your mouth into your ears," warned David, as a pleased grin overspread the boy's face.

A chuckle sounded as Ma Tu sped from the room.

After a shower bath David felt as fit as if he had had eight hours' sleep instead of one. His healthy appetite asserted itself, however, and he thought longingly of a steaming cup of coffee. Faithful Chinese servants were far from his mind as he stepped into his sitting-room and it was, therefore, with pleasurable surprise he saw the empty tray on his desk replaced by one containing rolls and coffee.

Calling mental blessings down on the thoughtful Ma Tu, David set to with a will. After disposing of the last crumb and pigeon-holing some business notes, which could wait over till the next day, he locked his desk and was ready for his morning ride.

It was weeks since he had experienced such a thrill of anticipation. The jewel he knew had nothing to do with it. No, he looked matters squarely in the face and confessed the cause of the rift in his clouded life was a Chinese maiden.

He was just on the point of switching off the light, when something white on the carpet near the door attracted his attention. Thinking it a paper carried from his desk by the breeze, David picked it up and nonchalantly opened it. What then was his amazement to see great splashes of red over which, in fine English script, was the following weird message:

“ East and West can never meet,
Our maidens, therefore, do not seek.”

At the bottom was a white dragon on red.

David was cogitating over this strange missive when Ma Tu entered to say the ponies were ready.

David nodded, folded the paper and placed it in an inner pocket. As he stepped into the hall, followed by his servant, he enquired casually, "Is there any particular significance or meaning attached to a white dragon on red, Ma Tu?"

"*White dragon on red*," repeated the boy, a queer, frightened look overspreading his face. Then forcing a grin he shook his head. "Ma Tu not know."

"What!" David stopped short. "You dare to hand me a brazen lie, Ma Tu? Out with it, quick!"

The boy glanced at his master's face, concluded dissembling was useless, and blurted out: "White dragon on red bad, very bad."

"So much I've already guessed, boy; but the exact meaning?"

"White dragon on red, death by the gods."

"By the gods, eh? Sounds rather a nice way to die!"

Ma Tu glanced at his master, a troubled look on his face. "Master laugh—joke, but white dragon on red bad, very bad."

"Ah well, I guess we haven't much to fear from the gods, and as for the devil, we'll slay him with his own weapon, eh Rapids, old boy?" And David held out a lump of sugar to his whinnying pony.

CHAPTER X

PEKING was covering herself with the first flimsy garment of day as David and his servant clattered through the streets. Except for a few laborers, vendors who were hastening after the early trade, and several rickshaws, perhaps carrying officials from an all-night entertainment, the streets were deserted. The city was asleep. Two or three more layers of day would have to be fastened on before she would show herself.

David was used to the hour of dawn, but the wonder of a new day never waned for him. As they were facing the hills, with a strip of the sandy plain between, the sun burst in a sudden flood of glory over the Eastern world. They halted to watch a train of camels slowly and majestically wending their way. It seemed to David he was back in the early ages. It appeared not improbable that if he stole alone out here when night had fallen wise men of the East would greet him. Perhaps they would point to a star and tell him how they were led to a manger where the Christ child lay. But the camels had passed, and the sun's rays were emblazoning with a wonderful radiance an object on the peak of a distant hill. David's

biblical scene vanished. Before him coruscated an emblem of paganism—a Buddhist temple.

With the darkness had fled Ma Tu's dread of the unknown. His smile grew frequent and he answered his master's sallies with low, full chuckles.

Concern for his faithful servant caused David to lead a moderate pace. While a flesh wound need not be serious, still it might prove painful and very troublesome, and setting aside his genuine liking for the Chinese boy, David did not relish the idea of having him sick on his hands just then.

So half an hour later than it usually took to cover the distance, the temple home of the Culvers loomed in sight. Voices floating down to them proclaimed not all the household were asleep. Servants, no doubt, decided David. He wondered if he could get word to the doctor without alarming his wife. He had dismounted, and instructed Ma Tu to take the horses to the stable, when to his surprise the doctor himself came walking down the path.

Culver shook hands with his visitor cordially, and to David's surprise, took his call as a matter of course.

"News travels fast even in China, I notice. You are the first on the scene, not even a Chinese official has arrived yet."

"You have sent for protection then?" enquired David.

"Do you think it necessary?" questioned Cul-

ver. "It seems to me our protection is ample enough, with two men dead already."

"Two men dead?" echoed David, blankly.

It was Culver's turn to look surprised. "Why then, if you haven't heard, what brings you here at this hour, my dear boy?"

"I heard last night, sir, that an attempted robbery was to be made on the sacred ruby to-night, and am here to give you warning and to advise you to protect yourselves and it by means of a box—the box of death, I believe they call it—which is in the possession of a Mr. Tung Yung."

Culver rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Who is the person that gave the alarm, if I may ask?"

David flushed. "Some one, sir, who is only interested through blood ties with your adopted son. The name would not enlighten you and—"

"Enough, enough, David. As long as you say O. K. I ask no questions, my boy. Only the warning comes a night and day too late. The robbers came last night."

"Last night!" exclaimed David. "Then the ruby is gone?"

"No, thanks to your uncle, we were prepared. He gave me no peace until we had the box of death in the house. Mr. Tung Yung advised that we advertise our possession of it, that no one then would molest us, but we overlooked this advice, which in any case would have been rather difficult to follow. Well, the thieves came, evidently

two novices, for they were not proof against the box."

"It's so deadly as that?"

"Deadly! It's like a rattlesnake bite. The name's sufficient. Terrible death for the poor devils. I regret now I was so lax in not having at least endeavoured to advertise what a death trap I had."

"But you are sure, sir, you are safe from the thieves with even the box? Might they not have an antidote for its deadly action?"

"I am told not. There is an antidote, but only four men in China know of its existence: a mandarin, who being related to Paul, is proud to have him own the jewel; a Mr. Tung Yung, the keeper of the box when it is not in use; Prince Tsoo, who gave the stone—and myself."

"It sounds like an extract from mythology," remarked David.

"Queer talk for the twentieth century, isn't it? But that isn't all. If you had seen the heathen performances I was compelled to go through in order to obtain the article and the pagan oaths I was forced to recite! I tell you, I wouldn't go through it again for all the sacred jewels in the kingdom, and I wouldn't have gone through with it this time but for Chess. Figuratively speaking, he stood behind me with a red-hot occult pitchfork. That uncle of yours, my lad, has more will power than Napoleon."

“They’re a strange people,” mused David.

“Strange and capable. If they weren’t half-buried in the past they could conquer the world.”

“And you believe, then, you are fully protected when the news gets abroad?”

“So I am told,” replied Culver. “It seems a religious significance is attached to the house that holds the magic box. The Chinese are very superstitious about it. They revere it as they do their ancestors, which is saying enough. And now, David, come in and have some breakfast. Irma will be glad to see you.”

“I suppose Mrs. Culver is very much upset over the affair?”

“Yes, but she bears up wonderfully. It makes it doubly hard for her to-day, too. This is our baby’s birthday. She would have been nineteen to-day had she lived.”

“Your wife is a wonderful woman, Doctor.”

Culver paused in the doorway, and laying a hand on David’s shoulder, said earnestly: “Life is a thorny way at the best, but a good wife is an antidote for every stab. May you be as fortunate as I have been, David.”

“Thank you, sir.”

Culver looked at him sharply. Was it fancy, he wondered, that detected a hopeless note in the voice?

A place was already laid for David at the breakfast table. A servant had evidently brought the

news of his arrival, and Irma was there with her kindly welcome.

"I'm sorry your uncle isn't back yet, David," she said, giving him her hand. "I don't know what we would have done without his head and shoulders. They seem to banish difficulties like magic, don't they, Neil?"

"A true friend, a priceless wife, both I possess, David. Do you not envy me?"

"Indeed I do, sir."

"But David, boy," warned Culver as he broke open a muffin, "don't let envy lead you the wrong way. Keep your smile till you reach old England or America."

"What needless advice, Neil dear," laughed Irma. "I hope you will like your coffee, David. I made it the American way."

David, seizing the opportunity to change the subject, gave forth a glowing eulogy on the beverage.

"By the way, David," continued Culver, in spite of his wife's anxious glances, "Mrs. Claymore has a Chinese protege, I hear."

"She's a mandarin's niece," broke in Irma, casting a warning but useless look on her husband.

"Of course, my dear. I am not disparaging the girl, only I am hoping Mrs. Claymore will never break her heart by taking her to America."

"You think human transplanting unwise?" questioned David. He hoped he had succeeded in making his question appear casual.

“ Well, David, as you know, Irma and I tried it. We believe that Providence has blessed greatly our efforts on Paul’s behalf. He is a wonderful lad, was a marvelous child, but somehow Irma and I, as much as we love him and as much as we are sure of Paul’s love for us, have always felt that during all these years a tendril attached him to his native land. And mind you, we wouldn’t have it different, would we, dear? ” turning to his wife.

“ No,” replied Irma quickly. “ We adopted him for the sake of China, that he might come back some day and implant ideas and ideals of the New World.”

“ And God willing, he will,” added Culver. “ Paul’s love for China is no small thing, and when he reappears among his own blood, his own people, he will still be one of them, but, thank heaven, with their superstitions and pagan worship swept away. My wish is that Paul be the seed, the beginning of a new East. His genius, his simplicity, his firm belief in the brotherhood of man I believe qualify him for that evangelical post. But, David, to go back to your question of transplanting the East to the West, our experiment was with the bud. I would not care for the responsibility of experimenting with a young plant. No, I would as soon toss it into a river of ice. As the saying goes, the East and West cannot meet. The East to know and love the West must start at the converging point and *vice versa*. They can’t cut across half way.”

David's mind confirmed all his host's statements, but his heart rebelled stubbornly. However, as he sat there doing fair justice to an appetizing breakfast, not even a connoisseur in human nature would have guessed the turbulence within. To be sure a shadow lent a seriousness to the grey eyes and lines of weariness were around the firm mouth, but a glance at the three short gold stripes on the khaki sleeve answered readily for these.

Irma Culver tried not to let her glance linger on the serious young face. Perhaps it was her own bitter past, the wound which had never healed, that made keen her woman's intuition, for she knew David was now in the throes of a bitter conflict, the conflict with self.

At ten o'clock Chesterton Reynolds returned with two Chinese officials, who were very polite, and very obsequious to the foreigners. They poked their heads with superstitious awe into the room where the tragedy had occurred. They made no notes, however, with regard to the two victims. Instead, they gave hurried instructions to their subordinates, who set to work to remove the bodies. Once they were compelled to enter the room, and as they passed the table where the ruby reposed in its deadly case they bowed to the floor, knocked their foreheads several times on the carpet, muttering all the while low, weird-sounding incantations.

As David watched them any misgivings he may have had of further designs on the jewel vanished.

Superstition would in future protect the sacred ruby from the most avaricious as well as the most prejudiced.

The two officials took their departure with many apologies to the foreigners and assurances that no future unpleasantness would arise, as the other people implicated would be brought to justice immediately.

“I’m afraid, after all, their promises are only vapour,” remarked Reynolds, as with Culver and David he watched the strange cortege moving down the hill. “While their tongues wagged and declared otherwise, their sly glances and grins plainly indicated the nasty affair would be locked out of sight like a skeleton in a cupboard. But China won’t be denied her morsel of scandal any more than her foreigners. Look !”

The other two followed the direction of Culver’s eyes. The hill was dotted with eager, chattering groups, gesticulating and evidently much awed and excited.

“Yes,” replied Culver. “If advertising ensures the ruby’s safety, we need have no further apprehensions.”

CHAPTER XI

As dusk fell, David and his servant turned homeward. The city was in festive attire. It was with considerable difficulty they made their way through the gay crowds. Bands were playing, and lanterns of all sizes and descriptions were strung along the streets.

"What is it all about?" enquired David, turning to the beaming Ma Tu.

"It is the festive of Niu Lang and Chih Nu."

"Indeed! I'm afraid, Ma Tu, I am no wiser now."

"Master like know story?" queried the boy, with pleased eagerness that David should be interested.

"Indeed I should, Ma Tu. The stories of China are very delightful; a change of diet, as it were, for a practical Englishman."

"These two stars, Niu Lang and Chih Nu," began the boy, assuming an important air, "watch over the seed planter and the weaver, and they loved and married."

"Of course, the sensible outcome."

"Eh?" questioned the boy.

"Yes, Ma Tu, very interesting. Go on with your fairy tale."

“Feery tale? Funny word. What feery tale, Master Marsden?”

“A fairy tale, Ma Tu, is something too beautiful to be true.”

“Ah well, true or no, Chinese like. Yes, these two loved and married, but after that they no work for others so much. Then they punished and separated by River of Heaven and they meet once in a year, which is now. But there was no boat for Chih Nu to cross River of Heaven, so magpies spread wings, many, many, and on them she reach her man. They see each other one day only. Again magpies spread wings and she go back, but Niu Lang and Chih Nu no want to part. They weep and weep—that why so much rain at this time.”

“A very beautiful legend, Ma Tu, and I know you would like to celebrate Niu Lang’s and Chih Nu’s one-time happiness like the rest, so go along and join the crowds. You’ve no time to lose. An hour of frolic has already sped by.” Saying which David slipped some cash into the boy’s hand and galloped down the street, but he smiled at the echo of a gleeful chuckle.

As he navigated through the dense throngs a wave of loneliness swept over David. Amid the gay crowds he felt like a grim shadow. In a European city he would without difficulty have run across his own kind and joined in the festivities, but here in this Eastern land he was an out-

sider. The gayety floated all around, but did not include him. He wondered if Tu Hee were one of the merry-makers. Perhaps if he lingered about, fortune would reward him with either a glimpse, or an echo of her laugh, but thrusting the thought aside and lashing himself with mental epithets, he resolutely pursued his way to the hotel. Paying no more attention to the crowds, moodily and grimly he kept his eyes straight ahead. He had ridden thus perhaps a block when a woman's startled cry burst above the noise of the merry-makers. Turning his horse David made his way to where the scattered throngs were clustered in one dense blot against the glowing street. The knots of people made way for him as he approached, while curious eyes were turned on the tall, lithe foreigner in his military uniform.

It needed but a glance for David to take in the situation. The servants attached to a rickshaw had become involved in a lively bout with a couple of street vendors and had evidently come out anything but victors. But what was interesting the crowd was not the amateur boxers, but a young Chinese girl, whose scathing remarks were quickly restoring order. It was the voice, however, not the remarks, that riveted David's attention. Leaving his horse on the side of the street, he elbowed his way to the centre of the scene.

As the girl turned and faced him the angry flash in the blue eyes gave place to pleased surprise. A

small hand was extended and a relieved voice exclaimed, "O, Captain Marsden, I'm in such a ridiculous plight!"

"You seem to have the situation well in hand," replied David, with a smile.

"I was startled at first, in fact was much afraid," confessed Tu Hee, "and then I saw I must be firm with these dreadful boys. It all started over the vendors and the runners wanting the same side of the street."

"It is rather an unsettled night to be travelling alone, Miss Tu Hee. Perhaps you will let me have the extreme pleasure of accompanying you the rest of the way?"

The girl's smile was answer enough, so without more ado, David helped her into the rickshaw, and after giving his horse in care of a bright faced youth from the front row of curious spectators, took his place beside her.

When the sobered runners had carried them beyond the good-natured, wondering crowd, Tu Tee turned to her companion. There was a puzzled expression in the blue eyes as she spoke. "Is it not strange, Captain Marsden? this is the second time you have rescued me from threatened misfortune!" Then an annoyed pucker showing between her brows, she added: "The Sheldons should not keep such unreliable servants. I shall have to warn them against being imposed upon."

"This isn't *your* equipment, then?" questioned David.

“Gracious, no. I am just returning home from a visit to my school friend. You look greatly surprised, Captain Marsden, almost shocked. Is it not customary for ladies to travel alone in your country?”

“Yes, certainly,” stammered David.

“So I thought, but your face seems to indicate it is not proper for me.”

David laughed, but stopped immediately, as Tu Hee’s head lifted indignantly. The light flickering in from the street showed a flash of fire in the blue eyes.

“I beg your pardon.” David bent towards her. Any presentiment or thought of the future fled in the wonder of being alone with her, of sitting beside her, near enough to touch the soft folds of her silken cloak. The present alone held him entranced. Even prudence he shoved from him. “If I but dared tell you why I laugh,” he said softly.

Tu Hee’s calm gaze did not falter. Indeed, her look was too serene to suit David. It was speculative, too.

“There to me is nothing unusual about your laugh, Captain Marsden. It is carefree, spontaneous, like the laugh of all foreigners.”

“It is more than a national trait, this time, Miss Tu Hee.”

Perhaps it was the vibration in the voice or a look she saw in the eager face near her own that

caused a blush to rise over her cheeks and creep glowingly to the smooth brow.

Tossing caution to the winds, David took one of the small fluttering hands in his and said eagerly, "Do you mind my telling you, Miss Tu Hee, that it is only when I am with you I am happy?"

The rein of common sense was slipping from David's shoulders. Another minute and emotion would have tossed it disdainfully out of reach. The halting of the rickshaw, however, sent Cupid away frowning and announced that the Weng Toy residence had been reached.

Tu Hee at once became the alert, practical maiden. Turning to David she said anxiously: "We have reached the outer gates of the compound, Captain Marsden. For several reasons I think it better you should not come inside."

"But it is some distance to your apartment, Miss Tu Hee. I would feel more satisfied if I saw you right to your door."

"No, no. It is kind of you, but I must ask you to please come no farther." Parting the curtains of the rickshaw she called to the servants to wait until her companion alighted, then turning to David she said in a low, almost pleading voice: "Please think me not ungrateful, but after last night it is better we be seen not together. I can explain no more. Good night, my friend."

A pang went to David's heart as he noticed the strained look in the blue eyes and he felt it would

be unkind to protest. As he clasped the hand she held out to him he wanted to tell her how much she meant to him; how drear, how bleak his life had been until she had smiled on him. But the words died on his lips. It was as if Fate had suddenly erected a visible barrier, and the emotion that had been driving him on to exquisite carelessness as to the future turned back on him cold and shrivelled. Slowly his fingers unclasped the slender brown hand. His fascinated eyes wandered from the long gold nail-shield flashing in the half light to the serene, calm face of the girl, the girl who a few minutes before had been all smiles and full of soft, womanly, appealing charm, but was now a composed, emotionless Chinese maiden, whose eyes under their drooping lids flashed oblique glances like blue steel.

He was too dazed, as he stood on the road while the huge gates swung to barring him from the mandarin's compound, to notice a dark, sulking form slink into their shadow and disappear out of sight with the rickshaw.

David was half way home before reason banished the miserable disappointment that weighed like lead on his mind. It wasn't that his infatuation for the Chinese girl had abated. If anything it was keener than ever, but the fact that he loved a foreigner, nay, a pagan, with all the temperament and Old World training that would never survive modernism, confronted him, stripped

of all embellishments. But his walk in the night air cleared his brain somewhat. He was able to look matters squarely in the face and mercilessly cast out every shred of hope that clung so desperately as he resolved to drive out love from his life. The battle was a severe one but practically, he argued with himself, it was better, far better to go through life prosaically in the calm level path of mediocrity than be raised to the seventh heaven of bliss only to be cast down again. Love, he admitted, great as it was, could not stifle the protests of conscience. For Tu Hee's sake he must go away.

David heretofore had had full confidence in his will power, but he realized it was no longer trustworthy. The greatest thing in his life now, the element that overshadowed everything into petty insignificance, was his love for Tu Hee. He dared not linger in Peking an hour longer than was absolutely necessary. Therefore, as soon as he reached the hotel he set to work to put his official business in such shape that it could be finished without his personal supervision. This was not difficult to accomplish, thanks to his night and day work of the previous weeks. Yes, he admitted grimly, everything was working perfectly to enable him to go back to a dull, flavorless life, which even the ingredient of duty would be unable to raise to a bearable level.

There was one obstacle of protest that would need careful, diplomatic handling. He shrank

from facing the amazed disappointment of Grace and his aunt. He recalled now that he had had no opportunity to warn them of his recall by his Government. Well, thank heaven, the cablegram would convince them his departure wasn't a mere whim !

Leaving the disconsolate Ma Tu to attend to the rest of his packing, he set forth to break the news to his relatives.

He found his aunt in an excitable mood, waving to and fro a Peking newspaper. She was a woman in the fifties, whose natural proportions nature and good living had not stunted or dwarfed. There was not the slightest outward evidence that Grace was bone of her bone and flesh of her flesh. Her light blue eyes were set rather close together, which, with her rather long nose, gave a shrewdness to her face that bespoke plainly the fact she could manage her own affairs as well as those of her daughter, quite efficiently, and it was evident she was attempting to do the latter right now.

"Perseverance, you call it? What ninny hasn't perseverance when he's after an easy prize?"

"But, mother, he loves me and I love him."

"Love, bah ! love's as easy to acquire as corns, and marriage as hard to get rid of. Yes, come in, David. We don't mind you. You're one of the family and know its failings. Tell this girl what you think of that simpleton, Rowen Strathmore."

David gave one glance at Grace's flushed face,

and then turning to his aunt said good-humoredly: "I think, my dear aunt, under the circumstances that would be superfluous. I've told Grace already I think he's one of the cleanest, straightest, and all round most desirable youths of America to-day. I don't need to add my eulogy on his brain efficiency. Washington has already done that by sending him over here."

"Eh? What's that you say?"

The beginning of David's speech had caused the old lady to flop rather heavily back into her chair, but the last words brought her up again like a rubber ball.

"Yes, mamma," began Grace.

"Quiet," snapped her mother. "This discussion requires brains, not sentiment. You say, David, that America has been fooled by him?"

"I said nothing of the kind, my dear aunt. You know as well as I that Uncle Sam isn't easily fooled."

"Very true, very true, but this rumour of Washington shipping Rowen Strathmore here—for the love of Annie I can't believe it—no, sir." She focussed her eyes indignantly on David. "It's just some scheme you and that girl of mine have concocted between you."

"O mother!" protested Grace.

"Not another word. This isn't a matter of sentiment."

"It's no scheme, aunt. Young Strathmore has,

as I said before, been appointed to the diplomatic service."

"H'm. Marvels never cease. Fish will be developing brains after awhile. Well, as I always told Grace, if she could persuade him to stop the giggle, his brain might have a chance to grow."

"May I congratulate you then, aunt, on your future son-in-law before I leave for England?"

"Eh? What? Mercy, boy, have a care for my apoplectic tendency! I thought for a minute you were in earnest and going right now."

"You understood it right, aunt. I leave in the morning."

David found it harder work to convince his aunt than Grace of the necessity of his departure, but as for Grace, she showed no concern or regret at all. David was not a little disappointed over what he mentally termed infidelity to friendship, for somehow Grace was now the only plank in the maelstrom he had hoped might help to keep him afloat.

"Well, David," concluded his aunt, "it's the regret of my life you're Grace's first cousin. You're so like myself as far as brains go that eugenics would prohibit you for my son-in-law."

"O, mother!" came from Grace.

"Quiet!—David needs no apologies from me. This isn't sentiment. Well, David, as I've always said, money and brains are the staff of life, and you've got both. I'm as proud of you as if you were my own son."

David was touched in spite of himself by his aunt's reluctance to part with him. The light blue eyes were misty as she held his hand, and there was a wistful note in her voice as she enquired, "I suppose, David, we could never make a Yankee of you, but when I'm alone—"

"Alone? Why, aunt, what's come over us all? It's that blame word 'Good-bye'! It should never have been invented."

"Alone is the word, David," persisted his aunt. "If the American Government wants a diplomat it must be obeyed, and if the diplomat would do better work with a wife he must have one."

"Mother!" Grace made a step forward, but her mother waved her away.

"This isn't a matter of sentiment—it's better business all round for two young people to be alone; besides I'm tired to death of this heathen country. I haven't given in, but the truth is I'm just dying for a sight of the Blue Mountains of Kentucky."

But Grace had her arms around her mother, and smiles and tears mingled.

David, while he rejoiced with them, felt miserably alone. A fierce desire took possession of him to toss scruples to the wind—to love and live. But the conflict lasted only a moment. Quietly he slipped from the room, glad for Grace's sake self-denial wasn't a family spectre. He had taken only a few steps down the hall, however, when the door flew open. Throwing conventionality into

Mrs. Grundy's lap, Grace ran after him and flinging her arms about his neck she kissed him on both cheeks. "David dear," she whispered, "I know why you are leaving. May God bless and help you!"

For answer David stooped and kissed her forehead.

As Grace re-entered the sitting-room she said softly, "Poor David!"

"What's that?" questioned her mother.

"Nothing, mother. I was just wishing everybody was happy like me. Poor David—I—"

"David unhappy?—nonsense! He has too much brains—no sentiment about him."

CHAPTER XII

A SURPRISING change came over Tu Hee after David had left her. She peered out between the curtains of her rickshaw until the big gates clanged to, shutting from her view the tall form standing rigid in the centre of the road. David's idea of a quiet, indifferent Chinese maiden would have received a decided jolt could he have seen the sudden soft light in the blue eyes, heard the low laugh that rippled from between her parted lips, and the tattoo beat by her slippered feet. These actions not giving sufficient vent to her feelings, she brought her hands together and bounced up and down like a gleeful child. Then all at once her face grew wistful, and she whispered low, as if afraid the breeze, which swayed the curtains of the rickshaw, might overhear, "My English mandarin!" and with a happy sigh lay back among the cushions.

Poor Tu Hee! already a grim, cruel shadow was over her, which was to chase the smile of youth from her lips for many a day. So happy was she in her dreaming that she did not notice the lapse of time, did not waken to the fact that the runners had covered enough distance to arrive at her door

a dozen times over. It was the shrill, piercing call of a shriek owl that aroused her. Parting the curtains, she looked out. To her amazement she was no longer in her own grounds. Instead, trees and hills surrounded her. Indignation and fright mingled in her tones as she called out, "Where are you taking me? Stop, you have—" But a wild scream finished her sentence, as she crouched in terror into the further corner of the rickshaw, away from the two evil eyes that peered in at her.

A voice which she knew only too well answered her. "Frightened? Shall I come in with you, little Tu Hee?"

With an effort Tu Hee forced herself to sit upright. She returned calmly the look of the bold eyes, but her nail shields cut into her flesh cruelly as she clenched her hands. "What does this mean, Chu Sing? My uncle, as you know, does not allow me to travel at night."

"So I said to myself when I saw the foreign devil with you."

Tu Hee decided she was using the wrong tactics. "Do you know, Chu Sing"—a half laugh accompanied the words—"you frightened me for a minute! Please tell the runners to turn back. I should be home."

"Home—ah, what a word!—just where we will be soon, my dear."

With a cry Tu Hee leapt from her seat, but before she could make another move her arms were in an iron grasp. She was forced back, and

to her horror and fright Chu Sing seated himself beside her.

"Alone at last," he whispered.

For a moment Tu Hee thought merciful death had come to release her. She did not know it was merely fear paralyzing and turning numb her whole being.

A laugh broke the stillness of the night, a laugh that started her blood creeping again with horror. The evil face came nearer. She felt his breath on her face and neck. With a feeble cry she put out protecting hands. They were clasped in the hot grip of the man and she felt herself being drawn forward. In vain she struggled. She was pinioned like a helpless bird, and her captor was merciless. His arms were around her. His lips were on her neck. And then superhuman strength came to Tu Hee's assistance, and like a panther she hurled herself at him.

Taken unawares he fell back, and Tu Hee leapt past him out into the night.

The moon, which a minute before had flooded the hills with light, was now covered by a cloud. Tu Hee did not know where she was running to but she knew she must keep on. The savage shouting behind told her she was being hotly pursued. Her brain worked automatically. She longed for trees, anything that might conceal her. The ground was becoming uneven. She had apparently left the road. Her breath was now coming in dry, sobbing pants. Oh, if the gods would only

let her die! Then the moon suddenly bathed the world in a silvery, dazzling glow and Tu Hee's wild eyes saw trees, clusters of them, but they were up the hill. Could she reach them in time? A wild barbaric yell told her she was seen. She dared not look around. Her strength was fast failing, but desperate fear, fear of something worse than death, gave impetus to her struggling limbs. Up, up, she stumbled, and then—it was a twisted tree root that was her undoing—her foot slipped. Physical pain mingled with her terror, and with a low moan she sank to the ground.

When Tu Hee opened her eyes the horrors of the night had not crept back into her mind. Darkness hid her surroundings from her and the softness of her bed betokened only luxury, safety, and home. Her head felt a little queer, and sleepily she turned to rest it more comfortably. A cry escaped her. Her ankle! As she raised herself on her elbow the whole horrible truth rushed over her, and in spite of the acute pain she started from the bed. Upon reaching the floor, however, she stumbled, and a chair overturned. Immediately the door opened, and Tu Hee's wide horror-stricken eyes fastened on the stream of light that crept in. Relief almost choked her as she saw a Chinese woman servant enter with a lamp.

Toddling forward on her tiny feet she set the lamp on a small teakwood table near the bed and then prostrated herself before the pale, frightened Tu Hee.

"Please get up," commanded Tu Hee in Chinese. "Tell me where I am."

The woman rose and for answer gazed at her interlocutor in dumb, stupified amazement.

"Where am I? Please tell me." Tu Hee's question in spite of herself was a frightened wail. Still the woman did not reply.

Tu Hee moved forward a step. The pain of her foot turned her faint, but fear and will power enabled her to overcome her physical weakness. Grasping the woman by the shoulder she said sharply, "Speak—where am I?"

The woman put out her hand pityingly. "Lie down," she said soothingly. "Lady sick. I call Master Chu Sing." She turned away as she said the last words.

"No, no!" shrieked Tu Hee, stumbling after her; "come back!"

The woman stood still. A flicker of wonderment passed over her stolid, stupid face as she crossed the room.

Tu Hee grasped her hand tightly. She felt somehow this woman was a safeguard. "You must not leave me," she pleaded. "Tell me, is this Mr. Chu Sing's house?"

The woman nodded.

A groan escaped Tu Hee. Hope deserted her entirely now. Chu Sing might come in any minute and then—. A shudder convulsed her. It seemed as though her brain would give way. A twinge of pain brought her attention to her ankle. It

was neatly bandaged and she wondered vaguely who had done it, but what did it matter? Oh, if she could only escape! Was there the slightest chance? she asked herself, as her gaze rested on the woman in front of her. Well, she could at least try. "Please fetch me a drink of water," she said wearily.

The woman bowed and hobbled from the room.

When the door had closed, Tu Hee, as quickly as she was able, made her way to it. To her relief it was unlocked, but, and new-born hope turned to ice around her heart, another door confronted her. She turned the handle but the barrier did not give. She was a prisoner in Chu Sing's house.

CHAPTER XIII

“NIU LANG and Chih Nu are weeping buckets this morning,” exclaimed Mrs. Claymore to Pep, her white Persian, as she gazed at the downpour from her sitting-room window. “That means Tu Hee will have to meet the Culvers under trying conditions. However, it’s only me who’ll suffer in looks — the child is such a fairy. My gracious, Pep, if that isn’t a woman climbing the hill — why I declare it’s Lun! She’s coming to tell me, I suppose, that Tu Hee isn’t a duck. Well, well, it’s a disappointment, but — why mercy, the poor creature can hardly get up the steps! I had no idea she was that old or feeble.”

Mrs. Claymore ran to the veranda and helped the tottering, dripping Lun into dryness and warmth.

“Why, Lun, you are ill. Why in the world did you ever —”

But Lun let Mrs. Claymore get no farther. Claspings one of the hands that was removing her wet cloak she cried shrilly, “She’s gone — gone — the Gift of the Gods!”

The pagan wail sent a chill through the American woman.

“Lun, you are ill, overwrought. Sit here while I get you some tea. No, not another word now. I won’t listen.”

In two minutes Mrs. Claymore reappeared with a steaming cup in her hand, but it was no use. The cup was only a receptacle for the Chinese woman’s tears. Rocking herself back and forth, she gave vent to her emotion in heart-rending cries and wails.

Mrs. Claymore, deciding remonstrance useless, seated herself in a corner and let the woman’s anguish have sway. In a few minutes the paroxysm abated and she turned to the other with a little moan.

In an instant Mrs. Claymore was at her side. “Now, Lun,” she said softly, “tell me what has happened.”

In trembling, moaning tones she told of how Miss Tu Hee, her darling child, had gone to spend two days and nights with Miss Leon Sheldon, a foreign school friend; that when Tu Hee did not return last night as she had promised, she, Lun, had set off at midnight to seek her. She had aroused the foreigners from their beds and learned that their servants had taken Tu Hee home at eight o’clock. They had sent for the runners, but the men hadn’t yet come back. Thinking perhaps the festivities had tempted them, they bade Lun wait till their return. Lun waited and waited. When hours passed and they still did not come, the foreigners, becoming uneasy, went out

and made inquiries, but no trace could they find of Tu Hee or their servants.

Mrs. Claymore listened in alarmed amazement to Lun's strange tale. Horrible fears attacked her, which she tried in vain to thrust from her. Every conceivable horror she had ever read or heard of the Chinese committing came into her mind until the cheery, practical woman was almost as frantic as Lun. She felt she must go out and search, but where could she go? And then a ray of relief came to her. She would go to David Marsden. He loved the girl and would move heaven and earth to find her.

"When do you expect the mandarin home?" she enquired of Lun.

"He home from Shanghai to-night."

Taking time only to cover her house slippers with overshoes and slip into her waterproof, Mrs. Claymore was soon ready to start on her pony for the city. Lun had already set forth on her return journey. It was agreed that if any news came to the mandarin's house, a messenger was to be dispatched to the American at once.

The streets of Peking presented a dismal sight after the night's festivities. Remnants of fire-crackers and torn, dripping lanterns littered the roads and walks. It was indeed a sorry spectacle. The rain came down harder than ever. The few natives who were forced out into the weather forgot their own discomfort in watching the dripping, foreign devil flying through their midst. It

required a decidedly optimistic nature to see even a flash of sunshine through the cloud that obscured Tu Hee. Even bright, cheery Mrs. Claymore left her last ounce of hope behind her in the dirty, littered streets. A presentiment possessed her as she entered the hotel that the little Chinese girl's bright face was lost to them forever.

She gazed in speechless amazement when the clerk at the desk informed her that Captain Marsden had left for England that morning. Curious eyes followed her as she staggered to the elevator. David gone—that was the last straw! Could it be possible? A ray of hope buoyed her an instant. But no, the ray turned to another dead cinder of disappointment. David was too level-headed. He could love a woman to distraction, but honor flew as high as his love. Besides, Mrs. Claymore knew that David's liking for the mandarin was too genuine for him to elope with his niece.

She felt too sick at heart to talk to anyone, and hesitated when opposite the Ashton apartments whether to go in or not. But her hesitation wasn't of long duration, for the door opened while she stood there and a surprised servant stepped aside for her to pass.

"Why, it's Helen Claymore!" exclaimed Grace, coming forward. "Good gracious, my dear, you are simply drenched. Come in quick and let me take those wet things off you."

Grace chatted as she unbuttoned the water-glazed cloak and heavy, sodden overshoes.

“China’s taste for thorough old-fashioned things even extends to her rains, doesn’t it? Poor David, it was a miserable send-off for him. But of course you haven’t heard of his sudden departure for England? Why, Helen, you are ill.”

Grace ran from the room and reappeared with a glass of wine. “There, that’s better,” she exclaimed a few minutes later. “You frightened me for a minute.”

Mrs. Claymore smiled wanly. “I’ve received a frightful shock, Grace, dear. The mandarin’s niece, Tu Hee, has disappeared.”

“Tu Hee disappeared?” repeated Grace in shocked amazement.

Mrs. Claymore nodded, and explained briefly what Lun had told her.

Grace listened with horror-stricken eyes to the tragic story. Glancing at her wrist watch she said thoughtfully: “It’s now eleven. David sailed at seven. Poor David! poor Tu Hee!” Tears welled up in her eyes as she spoke.

Helen Claymore’s eyes were not dry either. The memory of the Chinese girl’s charm overwhelmed her. She felt her loss as keenly as she would that of a younger sister.

Grace wiped her eyes and her voice was husky as she spoke. “I feel this terribly, Helen. David loves her, as you must know, and I did my best to dissuade him from thinking of her.” She rose and walked to the window. “I don’t know if my advice had any weight with him or not, but I can’t

help feeling partly responsible. Why, oh why, was I such an idiot as to interfere with two people's fate—their whole lives? ”

“ Don't talk that way, Grace, dear. You aren't the only one who felt that England or America would kill Tu Hee.”

“ No,” acceded Grace, coming back and seating herself beside her friend on the couch. “ I know the Culvers and his Uncle Chess were against such an idea, but it was different with David and me. We were more than pals. He was just like a dear, only brother to me. And you, Helen, you always claimed Tu Hee would bloom like a rose on foreign soil, didn't you? ”

Helen Claymore nodded. “ I've studied the child closely. Deep down she is as much Anglo-Saxon as you and I. She has the Chinese veneer, but it is only veneer—her soul is white. I mean that literally. Her love for her uncle is the strongest link that binds her to paganism. That reminds me, Mr. Weng Toy returns to-night from Shanghai. If you'll put up with my company until then, Grace, I'll wait and see what he intends to do.”

“ O Helen ! do we have to wait till then? Can nothing be done before? ”

“ I don't see how. Mr. Sheldon is doing everything possible. Remember, we are women in a pagan land, dear.”

“ Do you think,” continued Grace, “that if we went to the mandarin's house we might find out

anything? Even a tiny clue might lead to something."

Helen Claymore shook her head. "According to Lun, Mr. Sheldon interviewed every servant. Not one of them remained home last night. They were all at the festival. Even Lun was out till ten o'clock."

"Well, Helen, I can't rest here. If it's pouring torrents I feel I must be out and doing something."

"What do you propose?" questioned her friend.

"I shall send a messenger to the American Legation for Rowe and have him accompany us to the Culvers. Together we ought to be able to think out some plan."

So a messenger was despatched, and the two women sat down and waited.

CHAPTER XIV

WHEN Tu Hee discovered she was indeed a hopeless prisoner, she felt there was nothing to do now but pray for the gods to take her. But, she asked herself, would the gods hear her? They apparently had no pity on her or they would have saved her from this—the disgrace of being in Chu Sing's power. She crept back to the bed, where she sat with her head buried in her hands. She looked up fearfully when the door opened, but it was only the woman returning with a pitcher of water.

Tu Hee drained a glass eagerly and her parched throat called for more, but the servant shook her head. Tu Hee pleaded, reached out her hand insistently, but even as she spoke drowsiness befogged her brain—a queer, helpless sensation took possession of her limbs and she sank back on the bed.

When she awoke, the rain beating against the window and the faint light entering the room announced that morning and a storm had arrived together. Her head felt clear. The memory of the past hours rushed over her again, but not with renewed horror. She was the calm stoic now. She would struggle no more. Death was

always within reach. The sound of a chair moving caused her to turn her head on the pillow. The waiting-woman was approaching with a tray of food.

Tu Hee turned away. She knew there had been something in the water that had caused the deep sleep from which she had just awakened.

The servant, noticing the movement of aversion, bent over her charge and in quick, eager Chinese said: "I gave missee sleeping medicine, missee needed it. She not sleep without it, and not sleep means very sick."

Tu Hee turned wide eyes on the woman and smiled faintly when her gaze did not waver. Deciding she needed her strength for whatever emergency threatened, she forced herself to eat and drink the food before her. With the nourishment came fresh courage to Tu Hee. She began to think she had been exaggerating matters greatly. That Chu Sing wished her for his wife she had known for many months, but that he would dare harm her she thought now was highly improbable. The greatness and power of her uncle, Weng Toy, overshadowed him too much. No, Chu Sing was probably trying to frighten her. Perhaps his motive was mere jealousy of the foreigner. He wouldn't dare keep her a prisoner another day. Why, her uncle would scour the country for her, and Chu Sing was too shrewd not to know the very least he could expect would

be a death penalty. Her reflections were interrupted by the woman reappearing with fresh bandages for her foot.

"Misse's foot much better," ventured the servant with satisfaction, as she applied a lotion on the bruised, swollen ankle.

Tu Hee winced as the long, deft fingers wound a fresh bandage into place. "Thank you," she smiled. "You are very good to me. I shall always remember this."

A pleased look flashed across the woman's face, but the next moment she was the stolid, obedient slave.

Tu Hee longed to ask questions, but some inexplicable intuition kept her silent.

The woman went to a small cupboard in the wall and returned with a mauve silk dressing-robe. Plainly Chu Sing intended every bodily comfort should be hers while she remained his prisoner.

Tu Hee shook her head as the woman held out the garment. Her glance was rueful, however, as she surveyed her own crumpled appearance in the mirror. Her dress was torn in several places, as well as grass-stained. She decided her companion was a marvel at mind-reading, for when she turned from surveying herself the woman stood ready with warm water, towels, and all the necessities, such as rouge and powder and pencil, for a Chinese maiden's toilet. Concluding it was

policy to appear at her best, Tu Hee made no protest, but willingly put herself in the skilful hands of her new maid.

In an hour's time she was the well-groomed child of fortune again. Even her dress had been made to assume its old daintiness. The woman accomplished this only when she saw her new charge was firm in her refusal to don any of the garments with which she endeavored to tempt her.

Tu Hee was now all ready for Chu Sing. The horrors of the previous night had faded a little in his continued absence and in the glow of adventure. Her spirits did not sink, even with the insistent beating of the rain against the roof and window. She thought of her uncle. He would be home from his trip to-night. Surely Chu Sing would not dare have her absent when he returned. Ah, no, she assured herself, he would not dare! But—and a sudden chill ran through her—perhaps she was miles and miles away from home. She had no means of knowing how far she had journeyed after she lost consciousness. Possibly she was in some lonely part of the interior. If she could only look from the window, but it was too high to reach, unless—. She glanced apprehensively towards the door. The woman had gone out half an hour previously. Perhaps she would be able to get an idea of her surroundings before her return. Tu Hee's foot was not far on the road to recovery, which she discovered when she tried to coax it to give her a

little support. So it was by hopping on one foot and pushing a heavy carved chair to the small window that she achieved her purpose. Her lame ankle protested vigorously at being lifted so far off the floor, but, setting her teeth grimly, Tu Hee succeeded in getting her eyes on a level with the pane of glass. Eagerly she peered out, but, alas, only the swaying, creaking limbs of trees and blowing rain rewarded her effort.

Ungracefully she clambered from the chair, unaware whether she was in the suburbs or in Peking itself, or—and the thought sent a shiver through her—out in the country of brigands.

The minutes and hours dragged into noon at last. Tu Hee began to grow anxious. Why did her captor not come? The mystery and inaction of her position began to tell on her. There was nothing to do but sit with folded hands and think, and to think was the worst thing she could do. It got her nowhere, but simply opened the gates for vivid, horrible imaginings.

A step sounded outside the door. Tu Hee held her breath and waited. Terror had her in its grip. She heard a key inserted and waited for Chu Sing to enter, but it was only a Chinese boy with a tray of steaming, appetizing food.

Bowing low and respectfully, he set the tray on the table and with another bow glided from the room.

This was too much for Tu Hee. Throwing herself on a couch, she sobbed with fright and

loneliness. What did it all mean? "O, Uncle Weng, please come to your little Autumn Gladness!" she sobbed wildly. Her past bravery had fallen from her and shivered to atoms. Cold presentiments of overhanging evil gripped her mind as she lay there clutching the cushions. How long she remained thus she did not know. She cared no longer to count the minutes or hours. She felt the gods had indeed abandoned her. Her ankle throbbed with pain, but she did not mind. Indeed, she welcomed it as a sort of antidote for the torture of her mind. The storm had increased to shrieking fury and pelting hail. Thunder pealed and shook the walls of the house. The thought entered her dazed mind that perhaps the gods were angry, that the roars of thunder were vociferous protests at her suffering. Perhaps they would destroy her persecutor—had already destroyed him, which accounted for his strange absence.

A soft, hesitating touch on her head brought her imaginings to an end. She opened her eyes wearily. It must be night, for the lamp was lit. The waiting-woman was speaking to her, was begging her to take some food. Tu Hee shook her head and turned away, but the woman pleaded: "If you not eat you get sick and die."

"Ah, if I only could!" sobbed Tu Hee. But the effort to speak roused her, and she sat up and allowed herself to be helped to the little table.

A dinner lay before her savory enough to tempt the most fickle appetite. Watermelon seeds, fruits, nuts, and jelly were the dainty first course. Tu Hee forced herself to take the fruit jelly and drink the deliciously-prepared sweet lotus seed broth. The woman stood eyeing her anxiously, and when those dishes were pushed aside placed in front of her the tempting breast of a chicken.

Tu Hee did her best, but the food choked her. The image of her uncle obtruded itself, overcome by fear for her.

The visualation was too much for her. Turning to the servant she cried passionately: "Oh, please help me to get away! I must be home tonight or my uncle will die of grief."

The woman's stolid face did not change. Seemingly unmoved by the piteous appeal, she merely shook her head.

"I can't spend another night here, it would kill me!" cried Tu Hee. "You look kind," she observed, scanning the woman's face, "but it is not merely gratitude that would be your reward," she added, realizing all too well the mercenary traits of the servant class. "My uncle would give you money—make you rich."

But the woman again shook her head. Yet it seemed to Tu Hee her round eyes grew softer. She derived a little hope from this. And then the thought occurred to her that perhaps Chu

Sing had threatened her. She must be fully trusted by him or he would never have left her in sole charge of his prisoner.

Desperate, Tu Hee threw herself before the woman and clasping her hands cried: "You must help me. You must! You are a woman. Don't you understand? I hate, hate this man who has brought me here! If you do not help me to escape I shall have to kill myself."

The woman looked at her curiously and raised her gently to her feet. "Love not now, perhaps, but it will come after marriage. Listen, the rain comes in rivers, the winds blow hurricanes. Ten miles next house. Escape impossible."

Tu Hee's face went white. "No house within ten miles," she repeated dully. "Then we are far, far from the city?"

"Twenty-five miles from Peking," replied the woman.

Tu Hee moved across the room. She even used her lame foot and was not aware of pain. Her brain was numb. One thought only reiterated through her mind. She was a prisoner twenty-five miles from home. She pictured her uncle entering the house, wondering why she was not waiting in the hall to throw herself into his arms and then guess which hand concealed the gift he had brought her. She looked dully at the Goddess of Mercy that gazed quietly down at her, and with a little moan dropped at the feet of the

image. Feeling returned to her heart and brain and she lay there sobbing like a child.

The morning, full of sunshine and fragrance, peeped into the room where Tu Hee lay. But it did not bring hope to the bewildered girl. Her resolution as she rose from her bed was to demand an explanation from the waiting-woman as to Chu Sing's whereabouts. She knew him too well to entertain as a reason for his non-appearance the storm of the previous day. Not that Tu Hee was by any means eager to see him, but she felt she must know his plan concerning her. So when her breakfast was brought in she was ready to let fly her darts of interrogation. She had learned by this time that her wily waiting-woman must be taken unawares if she wished to get the better of her.

"It is a beautiful morning, Su. Do you think your master would object to my getting a little fresh air after breakfast? Please ask him, will you?"

"Master Chu Sing not here," was the quick response.

"Not here?" repeated Tu Hee, dissimulating surprise. "Oh, well, he surely will be to-day. The storm has evidently delayed him."

"No." The woman shook her head decisively. "Storm not scare Master Chu Sing if thousand devils raged in it." She paused, and then added in a low voice: "Su thinks very strange, missee, Master Chu Sing not home, very strange."

“You don’t think anything could have happened to him?” There was an eager note in Tu Hee’s voice, which she could not stifle.

“I think maybe—strange, very strange,” repeated the woman, pouring Tu Hee’s tea.

When left alone a faint hope rose in Tu Hee’s breast, which grew stronger as the morning advanced, that Chu Sing had blundered and was held somewhere pending his confession of her whereabouts. So strongly did Tu Hee wish this to be the case that towards noon she really believed it was, and offered up incense in gratitude to the Goddess of Mercy.

Su was surprised at the relish her prisoner displayed for her lunch. She was mistaken after all in thinking her young charge had been pining over a secret lover. Well, it was better so, of course. She could more easily learn to love her husband, for Su didn’t doubt her master’s intentions in that respect.

Tu Hee had risen from her prayers, in which she had not forgotten to mention the young foreigner, Captain Marsden. She stood now recalling their last meeting. A shy smile parted her lips. What would have happened, she wondered, if their ride had lasted five minutes longer? Her day dream engrossed her so entirely that she did not hear the door open and close.

Chu Sing stood silently watching his prisoner. His face was drawn and haggard, and his eyes

bespoke a sleepless night. A sudden change swept over him, however, as his gaze dwelt on the girl before him. It was like a ray of light darting across a black cloud.

"Tu Hee!" he cried, starting towards her, hands outstretched.

Tu Hee swung around, a frightened cry on her lips. For a minute she felt physical pain. It was as if Hope had cut a jagged path through her heart as he fled. She shrank back out of reach of the outstretched hands.

Chu Sing dropped his arms and stood looking at her, while a bitter smile banished the gleam that had brightened his dark face.

Tu Hee, buoyed up by her belief developed from a wish, had been taken entirely off guard. Her face looked pitifully white and young under its make-up, and her blue eyes might have been peering into the very depths of hell, so great was the horror mirrored there.

Perhaps it was a flash of pity that caused the man to turn his back and cross to the other side of the room. After a few minutes of silence, in which he had studiously avoided a glance at the girl, he said casually: "I evidently startled you, Tu Hee. When you are used to my presence I want to talk to you." As he spoke Chu Sing wheeled about and faced her. "I am sorry if I frightened you. My love sometimes blinds me to the fact that you have none for me." As he

spoke he crossed to within a few steps of where she stood, enveloped in her old-time poise and her eyes gleaming like blue pools of ice.

“You, of course, know why I brought you here,” continued Chu Sing, goaded by her manner—“because you are to be my wife, as I always swore you would be.”

Tu Hee’s hands clinched, and her lips formed the word “Never,” but no sound came.

All at once the man’s tactics changed. He came a step nearer, and his voice was almost pleading: “Tu Hee, don’t you see I am mad over you? I didn’t want to do this thing, but I was mad the night I brought you here—mad when I saw the foreign devil standing in the road accepting your smiles as his right. Something snapped in my brain as I watched you, and when the gates closed I bribed the runners to bring you here. It wasn’t a premeditated thing. It was forced on me by my love for you.”

“Love!—you don’t know what love is, Chu Sing. You don’t even know what friendship is or you couldn’t have betrayed my uncle as you have.”

A lightning change swept over the man’s face. It was like the lash of grief. His eyes avoided Tu Hee’s clear gaze and his hand went to his forehead.

Seizing her vantage point, Tu Hee continued: “I believe, Chu Sing, there is a human spot in your soul. Tell me I am not mistaken. Take me

back to my uncle. He will be so overjoyed I shall persuade him to even forgive you, and these black days and nights will be buried out of sight in lasting forgetfulness."

The man's hand dropped to his side. Tu Hee started at the wild misery in the look he bent on her. Shaking his head he said: "It is no use, Tu Hee, I've sworn for years you would be mine, but now that you are here within my power, the gods have made me powerless."

Tu Hee sprang forward. Grasping his hands she exclaimed: "You mean you will take me home? O, Chu Sing, may the gods bless you for this! Let us lose no time then. Take me quickly to Uncle Weng Toy!"

It was almost a paternal look that Chu Sing bent on the eager, pleading face before him. His harsh, domineering manner had fallen from him, and there was a melancholy note in his voice as he replied: "Tu Hee, I cannot do what you ask."

"You cannot?" questioned Tu Hee, bewilderment in her voice. "You say you cannot take me to my Uncle Weng?"

Chu Sing shook his head. "No. Weng Toy, my friend, the best I had, is with the gods."

Tu Hee looked at him uncomprehending the tragic meaning of his words. Then, as the awful truth saturated her mind, scream after scream, heart-breaking and terrible, echoed through the room.

Chu Sing rang a bell that stood on a nearby

table. "Fetch me a sleeping potion," he ordered, as Su opened the door.

But many minutes elapsed before the quieting drug took effect on Tu Hee. This last blow was too much for the brain, already shocked from its normal balance, and as Chu Sing listened to the maniacal ravings and looked into the wild blue eyes, he bowed his head in bitter repentance. His evil doings had indeed turned on his own heart and were rending it in shreds.

CHAPTER XV

“It do missee much good if she go out.”

Tu Hee raised her head, shook it listlessly, and sank farther into the depths of the upholstered chair. “Nothing can do me good any more, Su.”

“It not good missee read that every day for month.”

Tu Hee folded the newspaper spread out on her lap. “No, take it away. I know by heart now how my uncle was taken from me. If he had only waited for the later train, as he intended, all would have been well, but poor Uncle Weng, he felt something was wrong at home, so he took an earlier one. Then just outside the city came that awful collision. He didn’t live long enough to send me a message; no, not one word!”

Even the stolid Chinese heart was touched by the hopeless tones, and by the tearless misery in the blue eyes.

As the woman left the room, Chu Sing entered. He glanced apprehensively at the figure in the chair.

“Feeling better?” he enquired in a somewhat abashed, hesitating voice.

Tu Hee studied him a moment. Then to the

man's surprise, said: "Chu Sing, bring a chair over here. I want to talk to you."

Unmistakably pleased, Chu Sing did her bidding.

Tu Hee's face softened a little as she watched his eager clumsiness.

"I think, Chu Sing, you really do care for me in your way. No, please don't interrupt me. I believe you are sincere in saying you are sorry for giving in to your headlong impulse to bring me here five weeks ago; but, frankly, Chu Sing, no words could make me believe you. What has proved to me your real repentance is your treatment of me since I've been your prisoner."

"Prisoner? You are not my prisoner, Tu Hee. I gave you your freedom a month ago. I have considered you and treated you as an honored guest since the night delirium seized you."

"Yes, what you say is true, Chu Sing." Tu Hee's voice was a little weary. "You gave me my freedom, but I no longer cared for it. Where was I to go? When my mind grew sane again Uncle Weng had been buried, and I could not bear the thought of going back where we had been so happy together. But now I feel differently about it. Perhaps because I am stronger. I want to go to my home, Chu Sing, just as soon as you can take me there."

A shadow crossed the man's face.

"It shall be as you say, Tu Hee. We can start to-day—at once—if you say so."

"Wait. Please sit down again. You brought me to your house here, Chu Sing, which, as you know, is one of the rites of marriage."

Chu Sing avoided the girl's eyes.

"No one need ever know, Tu Hee."

"But the rite has been fulfilled. I am according to my country's law one-sixth your wife. If you still wish me for your wife I am willing that the other rites shall be performed."

With a cry Chu Sing sprang to his feet. His dark face was transfigured.

"You mean that, Tu Hee? You mean you care that much for me?"

The blue eyes met his sadly. Tu Hee shook her head. "No, Chu Sing, don't mistake my meaning. My heart died with Uncle Weng. I warn you I may be a sad, melancholy partner for you. You had better not be hasty. Consider well. There are many happy young Chinese maidens who would be only too glad to be the wife of the prominent official, Chu Sing."

"I care for only one maiden. I shall live only to reawaken your heart, my little Tu Hee. I have loved you from the time I held you on my knee and played with you."

The man was bending low before Tu Hee's chair.

Tu Hee tried to overcome the repugnance that filled her as his breath touched her hand. Why did a pair of penetrating grey eyes intrude at that moment and a soft, well modulated voice

sound in her ear: "Do you mind my telling you that it is only when I am with you I am happy?"

But Chu Sing sensed nothing amiss. He drew his tall form to its full height. His shoulders swung back like those of a man who has received great draughts of new, energizing life. His harsh features looked almost handsome in the glow that suffused them.

Tu Hee's misery partly evaporated in the surprise of it all. Wonder seized her that she should be the cause of such a transformation. Surely she was making no mistake in giving happiness to her uncle's life-long friend; for, in spite of differences, Tu Hee knew an indissoluble tie had bound the two men. If the image of a manly young form in the khaki uniform of a British soldier obtruded itself, she shut it away with the curtain of Oriental prejudice. Was she not a Chinese maiden? Besides, had not his action in going back to his own country, without even a word or note of farewell, been sufficient proof that the foreigner had thought of her only as a passing diversion, easily forgotten? Yes, the folded newspaper had dealt two tragic blows to her young life. So there was nothing left to do now but pick up the broken threads and weave anew. Perhaps the fabric would be less colorful, have many desolate, barren spots, but at least she would do her best and not be ashamed when the gods saw fit to let her join her beloved ancestor. And so Tu Hee entered a new cycle of life.

Chu Sing was as good as his word. A mountain chair and runners were at the door surprisingly soon.

It was decided that Su should accompany her new mistress, for added to Tu Hee's already full cup was the fact that Lun had disappeared. No one knew where. A rumour had reached Chu Sing's ears that she had committed suicide, but this report he vigilantly kept from Tu Hee.

The mountain chair was borne swiftly through the hills by the agile runners, dusk was just falling when Tu Hee entered the courtyard of her home. Yes, it was hers now. The mandarin had left his beloved child everything he had possessed—everything?—no, not quite, for the sacred ruby was to go to Prince Tsoo. Tu Hee had not questioned her guardian's act. It is to be doubted if her great sorrow allowed her to grasp anything beyond the fact she still had a home. Details did not interest her. Whatever Uncle Weng had willed must be right, and there the matter ended so far as Tu Hee was concerned.

As the big gates swung open to admit the young mistress, hundreds of expectant forms were lined up. Glad cries went up as Tu Hee's face appeared between the curtains of the chair. Eyes were furtively wiped and husky notes mingled with the cries of welcome.

As Tu Hee alighted, her cloak slipped from her shoulders and she stood before them, a slim, girlish form in her mourning gown of white. Her

voice faltered as she spoke her greeting to them, her servants now, in Chinese. Her little unaffected speech finished, the entire assemblage prostrated itself. Standing there on the steps of her home, her eyes sweeping over the bent forms, servants of all ranks and ages, faithful every one, a great wave of comfort swept up and enveloped her. Their fidelity and allegiance engulfed her and she no longer felt alone.

With a delicacy which Tu Hee had not given him credit for, Chu Sing had absented himself at this her home-coming.

The rooms of the palace were softly radiant and flowers bloomed everywhere. Tu Hee wandered about, touching gently each dear, familiar object. She stood hesitant at her guardian's study door. Dare she go in? But even as she asked the question her hand dropped. Somehow she felt her heart would break with the keen, poignant memories of the exquisite, intimate hours spent there.

Closely followed by the watchful Su, she mounted the stairs to her apartments. At the top she paused. The perfume of flowers enfolded her. An arch of delicate waxlike blossoms curved above her, and her feet sank in a carpet of lotus. Soft music floated out from the recesses of the spacious corridors, while tenderly, feelingly, a chorus of voices reached her:

“O Gift of the Gods, so wondrously fair,
Let our love lift the rod of thy despair.”

Tu Hee's grip on life tightened. Such affection and loyalty demanded that she no longer nurture her own grief. Others had a claim on her mind and body. She had a duty to perform, a purpose to fulfil and life was commanding her.

But another surprise awaited her, the most gladsome one of all. At her bedroom door she begged Su to leave her alone for an hour. Somehow she could not bear that unfamiliar hands should attend her just yet in the little room where no stranger had ever entered. Here, too, love had been at work. The big rose-shaded lamp was already sending its soft glow over the dainty furnishings, but even its cheerful radiance could not stifle the loneliness that surged over her. It was short-lived, however, and was smothered out in a warm, passionate embrace.

It needed just such a familiar face as Lun's, and her old crooning tones, to open the flood-gates of Tu Hee's pent-up emotions. The old nurse was too wise to endeavor to hush the heart-breaking sobs; she let her child weep on, cuddling her to her bosom as if she were her baby again.

"You see, I'm not very brave after all, Lun."

It was half an hour later. Tu Hee, in a dressing-gown of white silk, was seated at her dressing-table with Lun in her old place behind her chair, uncoiling the heavy, dark hair.

"But it was such a wonderful surprise to see you, Lunnee, dear," continued Tu Hee. "No one could tell me very much about you. They have

been trying to find you for a month, and when not even Chu Sing succeeded in obtaining a trace of you I fancied terrible things."

"I went out of my head, I guess," explained the old nurse. "Wet through, I got, that awful day, the day I first knew you disappear and wander away. Some good folks took me in and look after me. Fever, they tell me, but news your coming marriage spread very queer and I hear this morning. Then sickness go. I happy again and come here at once."

Tu Hee told briefly of her forced journey to Chu Sing's home, touched lightly on her own fear and suffering, and endeavored to impress on her Chu Sing's sincere repentance.

Lun listened in silence, not even punctuating the story with her customary grunts, and Tu Hee knew she had not deceived her old nurse.

"And you really marry this man, this Chu Sing?"

"Of course, Lun. As one marriage rite has already been performed, I shall go on with the rest in a month's time. Of course there will be no display. I couldn't stand that."

"And you care for him?" persisted Lun.

"Is that necessary in our country, Lun, dear?"

"But you no even respect him, Misse Tu Hee."

"I have no one else, and in spite of all, Uncle Weng liked him. No, I shall marry him, Lunnee,

dear. Now, please let us talk of something else."

But Lun wasn't quite ready to drop the subject.

"And you marry him in month?"

"Yes."

Lun dropped the long strand of hair she was brushing and came around in front of her mistress. Her hands worked nervously and her voice was almost an angry wail.

"You cannot marry him in month. I say no — the gods say no."

"Lun, you forget yourself."

Tu Hee had sprung to her feet. Then in a softer voice: "Don't, please, Lun — don't act like this. Master Chu Sing is my promised husband."

"Yes, yes. I no say not to marry him. I just say not in month. Two months I say — eh?"

"Two months?" Tu Hee looked at her nurse in blank surprise. "Why two months?"

"I no can tell."

Lun's hands were tearing at each other frantically now.

"I no can tell, Missee Tu Hee. Wait, I can only say, two months."

"But how can you expect me to listen to you, Lun, when you can give no reason for your strange request?"

Lun shook her head. Her hands looked as though they were having a pitched battle. "I give no reason — I say wait."

"Nonsense. You are ill. We are both ill,

Lunnee, dear. Now please make ready my bed. I'm tired—I want to sleep."

When the door had closed Tu Hee sat with folded hands pondering over her nurse's strange request.

"She does not like Chu Sing," she mused. "She thinks no one is good enough for her child, dear old Lunnee!"

Thus dismissing the enigma Tu Hee rose wearily and crossed to the Goddess of Mercy, where her anguished petitions mingled with the incense she offered up.

CHAPTER XVI

“DRAT that girl for making me a traitor to myself. I always vowed I’d never let sentiment lead me by the nose, and here I’m letting it pull me up to Irma Culver’s heathen temple.”

Helen Claymore laughed good-humouredly.

“The fact is, Mrs. Ashton, you have such a big heart that sentiment sometimes shoves you.”

“Tut, tut, you’re wrong there, Helen, my dear. I never practice the foolish habit of cramping my own or another’s happiness. Oh, I won’t deny I used to try it when I was young, but the years have taught me the emptiness of this self-sacrificing piffle. God bless my soul, what’s that?”

“It’s only the runners changing the weight to another shoulder.”

“Why, they handle us like sacks of potatoes, and to think that girl inveigled me into a man-driven chair!”

“It really isn’t nearly so bad when you get used to it, Mrs. Ashton.”

“H’m, so my mother used to tell us when she brought the castor oil bottle out, but habit doesn’t deceive me, no, it does not.”

If Helen Claymore hadn’t thoroughly understood the enjoyment her companion was deriving

from her railings, the uphill journey might have dampened her spirits to limp remnants, but Helen knew, as the saying goes, that the old lady's bark was worse than her bite, and that under the crusty surface was a heart whose bubbling might any day burst through.

"You'll be surprised and delighted at the little piece of heaven you're going to see in a few minutes, Mrs. Ashton."

"Yes, I must admit Irma Culver was always a homemaker. Nice woman, very, but for the life of me I can't understand her coming back to this heathenish place. There's an example now of cramping self-sacrifice, and what good did it do them? Instead of staying home and working up a nice practice, like any sensible young physician, he must run off with his bride to this pagan land and force his bandages and drugs on dirty good-for-nothings who gave them no thanks. And what did they gain? Nothing, absolutely nothing. Instead they lost their child and made tragedy of their lives."

"But think of all the good he has done in the world, Mrs. Ashton. Where in all America will you find a man who has benefited children as he has?"

Mrs. Ashton sniffed contemptuously.

"And a blessed lot of good it has done either of them. It hasn't eased their hearts or they wouldn't be running back to this forsaken hole. But then, what's the world after all but a rubbish

heap of sentiment? Bless my soul, what Indian war cry is that? I declare if it isn't that girl of mine! Sentiment is driving her to her doom, too. Well, well, I may be a dried-up old woman, but my heart won't be the death of me at all events."

"Oh, here you are at last. We were wondering what was keeping you. Mrs. Culver has tiffin all ready on the verandah, and, mother, dear, some of your favourite popovers are piping hot, waiting for you."

"Indeed, and it's some leavening, I'm needing, instead of pop, after the juggling I've just gone through. If they must have one rut tracks for roads, why in the name of common sense don't they have one-wheeled carts?"

"Tut, tut, I'm not a cripple yet. I guess I can step out of an imitation baby carriage myself. Give me space, that's all. Now, Grace, lead the way to this tiffin business. The place looks like a Chinese puzzle to me."

Undaunted by her mother's irascible greeting, Grace ran ahead.

Irma Culver stepped from a bend in the path, beaming a genuine welcome on her two belated guests.

Under the gracious reception Mrs. Ashton thawed somewhat, and allowed herself to be relieved of her hat and gloves and led to the shaded, vine-covered verandah, where sinking into a comfortable arm chair, she looked around critically.

"Isn't it a perfect Garden of Eden, mamma?"

ventured Grace happily, but regretted immediately her thoughtless metaphor and fidgetted uneasily under her mother's surprised stare.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed that lady, "it sounds as if Adam were here already."

"At your service, Mrs. Ashton." And following the voice appeared an unabashed, grinning visage at the verandah railing, which an easy vault swung into the women's midst.

Dragging a chair from an isolated corner, Rowen Strathmore sauntered with it to Grace's side, where he sank into it with a contented sigh. The comical debonnaire smile was still on his handsome boyish face as he eyed the company complacently. It was plain he had no doubt of his welcome.

"Your voices haven't yet acclaimed my presence among you, but neither do I see frowns, so now I'll proceed to break a glorious piece of news to you. Ah, me, this is life after tugging a horse up the mountain on a blistering day in August — thanks, Mrs. Culver, was hoping, but wasn't quite sure that I'd be in time for tea."

"Doesn't the diplomatic service work on hot summer days?" Mrs. Ashton's voice was severe and her look more so.

"Makes slaves of us, every one, but the little god of telepathy whispered in my ear you ladies would enjoy my presence to-day, so here I am, at your service. Jiminy, this tea's good!"

“Pause between the sips, Rowe, we’re ravenous for that glorious news,” reminded Grace.

“Ah, yes, and it’s a real titbit, too. The mandarin’s niece is found.”

“Where? How? When?”

Rowe’s hand went up as if warding off a blow. “Please don’t shout, girls—you make me feel kind of weak, don’t you know!”

“Is she safe, Rowe? Oh, I’m so glad!”

Helen Claymore had risen and was standing before him, hugging her cup of tea rapturously.

“I can’t say I know very much about the affair, but I knew a drop would be welcome, so I hied off here as soon as I got the first trickle of the news.”

“Yes, yes, go on! Tell us all you know,” urged Grace.

“Well, as I have already said I don’t know very much, but she is home again and well, and is going to be married.”

“Married?” The word came in a dismayed gasp from the two girls.

Strathmore nodded. “Yes, she is marrying some rich old Chinaman. Don’t know his name. Ding Ding, or some such confounded lingo.”

“Not Chu Sing?” broke in Helen Claymore excitedly.

Rowe rubbed his chin. “Well, now, I believe that is the handle. Sounds mighty familiar anyway.”

“Oh, Rowe, you must be mistaken!” There was distress in Grace’s voice. “You know all Chinese names sound alike to you anyway and”—

“Tut, tut, child,” interrupted Mrs. Ashton. “Why are you concerned in these heathen marriages? Bless my soul, you’d actually think China was a creeping little ducky, the way you girls try to nurse and coddle her. You’re worse than the Northerners pampering our niggers.”

“O, mother, you don’t understand.” Grace turned again to Rowe. “And where has she been all this time, Rowe? Did you hear?”

Rowe shook his head. “Sorry to say that is a dark mystery, which the whole household has sealed tight.”

“You see?” There was a note of triumph in Mrs. Ashton’s voice. “The girl, as I’ve always told you, is no better than the rest of her kind. My advice is to wash your hands of the whole pesky lot. Listen to me, Grace, and you, too, Rowe, when you make your home here your best policy will be to mind your own business. Don’t you think I’m right, Irma?”

“I admit it’s not wise or safe to interfere too much with these people.”

“Of course not.”

“But it’s horrible to think of that child throwing herself away on that monster,” exclaimed Helen Claymore. “I can’t believe it. No, I can’t. There must be some mistake. It’s just some foolish gossip. Why, he’s old enough to be

Tu Hee's father. Oh, dear, if I could only see her, talk to her!"

"I don't think it would be wise, Helen, to attempt that," said Irma quietly. "If the girl has given her consent you would do no good and perhaps endanger your life by interfering."

"Bless my soul—interfere with Celestials! Why, Helen, you're clean daft."

Mrs. Ashton raised her hands in horror.

"I declare, both you girls talk of that chit as if she were one of yourselves. Why, I'd as soon think of championing one of our own nigger wenches."

"I think your mother is right in advising you to keep out of the domestic affairs of the Chinese, Grace," said Irma Culver gently. "The girl may have a foreign strain, but at heart she is a Chinese, thinks like a Chinese, and will live her life like a Chinese. Your interfering would be treated with hostility, and as I told Helen, your life itself might be endangered. They're a people you are never sure of. Give them a leader and a mob is ready made."

"Here, Rowen, make yourself at home with the popovers; and you, Mrs. Ashton, let me fill your cup. This tea is a brand sent us by a merchant we dealt with years ago, when we first came to China. The old gentleman is retired now, but he still keeps us supplied with the first pickings from his gardens."

"It is delicious," conceded Mrs. Ashton.

"Their tea is the only compensation they can offer a foreigner."

"It seems hard," continued Irma, "for you girls to keep from extending a helping hand to these people. It was the way Neil and I felt, in fact feel yet, but in this case I really think you would be unwise."

"Besides," interjected Mrs. Ashton, "the little minx evidently eloped with the man. Grace, I'm ashamed that you'd think twice of such a creature."

Neither Grace nor Helen offered any defense to Mrs. Ashton's tirade. That they were decidedly upset over the news was evident to everyone, however, and neither looked as though she were paying much attention to the advice offered. They concluded it was useless to argue, as the two older women had never met the Chinese girl, and therefore could not understand the winsome charm that had firmly knotted their cord of friendship.

The dampened spirits of the two girls were beginning to affect the social atmosphere, even the sallies of young Strathmore failing to raise a smile, when Irma's head boy relieved a trying situation by announcing that Mrs. Claymore was wanted in the sitting-room.

Grace sat on in abstracted silence; all Rowe's efforts brought only absent-minded monosyllables.

"I have to be back at the Legation in an hour. What do you say to a little stroll?" he whispered at last.

But for once Rowe's company proved an ineffectual trouble-lifter, and it was with almost a sense of relief that Grace waved to him half an hour later as she watched him ride down the hill on his way back to the city.

Instead of joining the others, Grace made her way to a secluded seat in some shrubbery overlooking a picturesque, green-clad, stream-ribboned valley. Her mind's eye predominated, however, and the beauty surrounding her was *nil* as far as she was concerned. A man's gloomy brow rose before her, and a pair of keen grey eyes looked reproachfully into hers. Why had she been such a fool as to have let David fly away like that? Was it too late to do anything now? Why was it that some people had to hew their way through life, while others skimmed over smooth, peaceful surfaces? If Tu Hee were to marry that awful Chinaman, her life would of course be in bondage forever. As it was, Grace had a strong conviction that the Chinese girl's betrothal had already cut her from David's life completely. And what of David? Would he accept the news calmly? Of course he would. It would be just another lash from Fate, but Grace had an uneasy feeling that the scar would be deeper than any heretofore.

“Whoo-ee!”

Grace darted to her feet and eagerly parted the bushes. “Yes, here I am, Helen.”

"Oh, Grace, I'm so glad I can have a minute alone with you. Where is Rowe?"

"Left ten minutes ago for the city."

"Thank goodness! Don't be vexed, Grace, you know it's the first time I've wished the dear boy away."

"Don't apologize, Helen. I think he recognized I was no fit company except for my own gloomy thoughts."

"Well, I don't feel very brilliant myself, so I guess it won't do any harm to spout out our fears to each other. Grace, the worst has happened."

"She isn't married already?"

"Just about as good, or rather bad—the sixth marriage rite has been performed."

"The sixth? That means she is his wife?" Grace's voice was hopeless.

"No, it seems—by the way, it was Lun who was here to see me—it appears the child was kidnapped, taken by force by that barbarian. He did her no actual harm, except to almost make her a nervous wreck. The death of the mandarin appears to have touched the invisible spot in his miserable heart, and he relented and offered Tu Hee her freedom. But she, poor child, was too miserable to think of anything but that she had been an inmate of his house, had actually crossed his threshold. This thought worried her. You know how virtuously and strictly these people bring up their girl children; the poor creatures are not even allowed to speak to a male as a rule.

Tu Hee's education, to be sure, was not quite so rigid, but the fact of putting her foot in Chu Sing's house—"personal receiving" is the sixth rite—together, no doubt, with his tragic air of despair, apparently forged an iron link in his favor. At all events the results is Tu Hee considers herself bound to him and has promised to be his wife in six weeks."

"And there is nothing we can do?"

"Nothing that I can see. Lun, poor woman, has been imploring me on her knees to delay the wedding for at least two months. She claims Tu Hee won't marry Chu Sing if we can persuade her to wait till then. Personally I think the poor creature is hysterical and hopes by delaying the ceremony to save the girl."

"What reason does she give for her strange request?"

"Not a word of explanation. That's why I don't feel like acting. She says Tu Hee would listen to me; but I'm afraid I couldn't make such an assinine proposal convincing enough to influence her."

"It does seem ridiculous," agreed Grace, "to delay the wedding two months, and the absurdity of it makes the old woman's request appear to have something back of it."

"But why doesn't she give me an inkling then? She was frantic; actually got down on her knees and blubbered like a child."

"Did you promise her anything?"

“Nothing definite. I said I would call and see Tu Hee, but it’s doubtful if she will see me. She’s gone into seclusion for her uncle.”

“Poor child, I suppose she feels nothing matters. I wonder if she really cared for David?”

“Well, if she did,” replied Helen, a practical note in her voice, “I hope she will be sensible enough to forget him. I wouldn’t want to see David mixed up in the affair now.”

“I feel like cabling him.”

“Grace Ashton, have you lost your senses?”

“But, Helen,” there was a catch in the girl’s voice, “you don’t understand. I feel horribly responsible. Just think if Rowe and I were parted — why, it would kill me.”

A misty look softened Helen’s eyes. “It is marvelous what the human race can endure. “I thought if anything happened to Fred I’d lie down and die, but when he was taken from me life laid obligations on me that could not be shirked and for my friends’ sake I had to live on.”

“Yes, but you have abnormal moral courage, Helen dear.”

“Have I?” Helen smiled sadly. “It must have been given me since then, for I had none at that time, Grace dear. God! the agony I suffered, the black clouds that rolled up and settled over me layers thick until I thought the sunlight would never penetrate again. But I think God has a reserve force which He lets us draw from when the terrible moments come.”

There was silence for a few minutes. Grace felt she had caught a glimpse of the real Helen for the first time and she was awed.

“Come.” Helen rose. “We’re forgetting we’re afternoon callers. I’ll have to sleep on this question. In the morning no doubt an inspiration will come. But, Grace dear, promise me you’ll leave David out. I feel it would be wicked, tragic, for us to interfere now. David is a man; he’s no weakling. He’ll work out his own salvation some way. And, dear girl, get rid of the idea that you’re responsible. Thank heaven, a good woman wields great influence, but I’ve a tiny conviction that David viewed all sides of this question and not even you, Grace, true and sweet as you are, could swerve him one way or the other.”

Grace’s face brightened. “Do you really think so? If I could only believe it. Oh, Grace, he has already suffered so much, and I can’t bear the thought that I have made life less sweet for him!”

“You haven’t. I believe that’s the doctor and Mr. Reynolds coming up the path. Come, we need a laughing tonic and Mr. Reynolds never fails us.”

CHAPTER XVII

“It’s like old times to have you to myself for a whole evening.”

Neil Culver smiled across at his wife as he spoke.

The light-footed servant had slipped away after bringing in tea and dessert, and there would be no more interruptions, unless it was a chance caller.

Irma laughed softly. There was a genuine happy ring to the ripple that caused Neil to raise his head expectantly.

“Something pleasant tucked up your sleeve, my dear? Ah, where’s Chess?”

Irma shook her head. “Chess was far from my thoughts, dear, but now that you mention it, there is a fragrance of romance in the air.”

“Helen Claymore? I honestly hope Cupid gets more than a finger tip on her shoulder. Stars of Georgia, wouldn’t it be the greatest coup imaginable if those two were to set the bells a-jingling?”

“Why, Neil, you’re growing reckless,” laughed Irma. “But I agree with you all the same. Helen is the sweetest thing and Chess the dearest old codger! It would be the very best thing for both of them and I believe it’s going to come true.”

Culver became serious. "Ah, you don't know Chess, my dear! The mammas have dangled for him for twenty years now. If Helen lands the old boy she'll be an A1 angler."

"Hush, Neil, do be careful of your metaphors. Helen, I'm sure, hasn't thought of such a thing. She may like Chess, but he'll have to go pretty warily to win her. We mustn't even breathe that we suspect. They're both like timid birds."

"Leave it to me. I'll be as innocent as a fawn until Chess asks for my hand-grip. And so that's why you're so perky, little woman?"

"Not altogether, Neil." Irma pushed back her chair as she spoke and glided around to her husband's side.

Neil laid aside his pipe as she drew up a small rocker and slipped her hand into his.

In the soft light of the swinging lanterns the youth of her face caused her husband to marvel. A faint flush was on her cheeks and her eyes sparkled softly.

"Neil, dear, it took China after all to lay the healing balm of content on my heart; for the first time I am reconciled."

Neil's clasp tightened over the small hand clinging to his. He cleared his throat as if about to speak, but remained silent.

"I've never studied or thought very much about Spiritualism," continued Irma, "but I have a feeling that our child is not far from us. I have not liked to speak about it before, Neil. If it made

me restless and unhappy I wouldn't mention it now, but as it has the opposite effect, I don't mind telling you. And," Irma's voice saddened a little, "while life is really beautiful if you do not clamp yourself shut like a pocketbook, still there are always great big tragedies lurking around the corner. I think it's our child's namesake, that poor little Chinese girl, who has set me thinking. Neil, has it occurred to you that if our child were living she might be ours no longer? Nineteen is a woman's years, and a woman's heart often wanders to strange places."

Neil did not reply at once, his tight handclasp only revealing his feelings. When he spoke his voice was slightly husky.

"Yes, dear, as you say, tragedy and heartache have numerous disguises. There are many things worse than death. Death, after all, hurts only those it bereaves."

The minutes passed. With a contented sigh Irma leaned her head on her husband's shoulder. For the next half hour nothing but the soft night-sounds, mingled with the mellow chimes of temple bells, broke the velvety silence. The moon rose full and silvery radiant in a starry, cloudless sky, and the fragrance of multitudinous flowers, interspersed with the aroma of the pines, encircled them.

For a time Irma's mind was passively content, but Irma Culver could not close up like a pocketbook. Her heart might be soothed into tranquility, but there were always tiny tendrils at work seek-

ing to reach and help some less fortunate mortal. One turned home now with an uneasy little quiver and startled Irma into tense consciousness.

Lifting her head, she said suddenly: "Who do you think was here yesterday, Neil?"

"Who, dear?"

"Lun; dear old Lun."

"You don't say! Well, well, I should like to see her. It was thoughtful of her to drop in on you."

"Oh, she hasn't forgotten us by any means, but I had nothing to do with her visit yesterday. She called to see Helen Claymore."

"Indeed?" Neil waited for his wife to continue.

"Yes. Lun has been employed in Weng Toy's household ever since leaving us. She is nurse to the girl who has aroused so much interest."

"You don't say! And she has been with her all these years? A faithful soul."

"Yes, and she idolizes the girl. Strange, isn't it, Neil, her name should be Tu Hee—Lun calls her another Gift of the Gods. She has inherited the blue eyes of a foreign ancestor, too, English, I believe; but you have most likely heard about it, dear. I really think that is why Lun cares so much. She has had charge of her from the time baby died. I wish I had stayed and seen the child that day I called so many years ago—sixteen, just think."

"Oh, well, my dear, I wouldn't think too much

about the girl. For all her foreign inheritance she is evidently more Chinese than anything else, and if she is betrothed to that wealthy Chinaman, Chu Sing, she is entirely out of our friendly reach."

"Yes, of course. I've been warning Helen and Grace against interfering, but the girl must be very uncommon to have interested them so keenly."

"As far as that goes, what Chinese aristocrat isn't patrician in bearing? Neither Helen nor Grace has had many opportunities of entering the homes of China, so no wonder their fancy has been captured. Well, my dear, what say you to a little stroll before going in?"

"Yes, Yo, what is it?"

The boy in the door looked rather frightened.

"Please, sir, I like to see you." And he bowed and backed into the sitting-room.

"How strangely he acts, Neil."

"They're easily flustered. Wait here, dear; it may be a night call." As he spoke, Neil stepped into the house after the boy.

Yo stood straight and stiff, the look of fright more pronounced than ever, and his hand shook as he held out a yellow envelope.

Neil's heart gave a heavy, dull throb as he saw the thick, black-typed word, "Cablegram." A hundred thoughts coursed through his mind, but fear predominated them all. Cablegrams were not so infrequent; why be so womanish? he ad-

monished himself, as his trembling fingers tore open the flap and a shaking hand drew out the yellow slip of paper.

The light flickered queerly over the typewritten words. They leaped up at him as if they would blind him, then receded to mere unintelligible scratches. At last he steadied his twitching nerves sufficiently to read:

“Sincerely regret inform you Lieutenant Paul Culver killed August 11th.”

Yo shrank away from the livid-faced man who staggered to his study. His faithful eyes lingered on the closed door and a strangled sob came from his throat as he heard the key turn in the lock.

Irma tarried on the verandah. The night was so glorious she couldn't persuade herself to leave it. Thoughts pleasant, and even dreams, brought the smiles to her lips and eyes. She raised a hand to replace a stray tendril of hair which the breeze had loosened. In the movement a paper rattled in her dress. She drew it out and held it against her cheek. It was a letter from Paul. She would read it once more before going to bed—no, she would wait. Neil would like to hear it again, too. This last thought recalled the fact that he had been gone many minutes. What could be keeping him? Perhaps it was a night call, but then he would have told her before leaving the house.

Humming softly, she opened the sitting-room door. Yo was still crouched against the wall.

“Why, Yo, what is the matter?” An icy dart

shot into Irma's heart. "Where is your master?"

A sickly smile wavered across the boy's face. He lowered his head in a jerky bow and motioned to the study door.

Irma's hand trembled as it fastened on the brass handle of the door. Heavenly Father! it did not give. It was locked.

"Neil!" Her voice was a frightened scream.

A heavy step stumbled forward. The door was thrown open and Neil caught his wife in a tight, stifling embrace.

Irma's eyes sought his face. "Neil, O Neil!" Her wild gaze roved to the desk. A yellow slip of paper lay open on its dark surface.

Black, delirious despair engulfed her. She did not ask any questions. Why should she? The truth was written in the face that bent over hers.

Irma's wasn't the calm, stoic nature that can smile as the heart breaks. Her voice now rose in an agonizing scream.

"Paul, my little Paul! My God, he is dead!"

With blanched face Yo crept to the door and closed it.

CHAPTER XVIII

“It’s a hideous crime, an insult to China, for the ruby to remain in the Culvers’ possession.”

“But what can you do about it?” As she asked the question Tu Hee paused in her walk and looked at her companion, surprised interrogation on her face.

“Sit down for a moment. You are not very strong yet, dear.”

Chu Sing’s voice was tenderly solicitous as he led Tu Hee to a garden seat. “No, thanks, I’d rather stand and have a full view of you. I wonder, Tu Hee, if you know how really beautiful you are! Every time I look at you my pulses go mad. You are my Goddess of Heaven!”

The last words were low and passionate, and with a quick movement the man seized Tu Hee’s hand and raised it to his lips.

Tu Hee’s face was a trifle paler when he released it. She trembled, and nervously clasped her hands tightly together.

“Ah, Tu Hee, if you could only return half the love I feel for you! But then, how could you? My love has been growing for sixteen years.”

“Sixteen years—a long time, Chu Sing.”

And then, perhaps to cover her previous confusion, she added with a nervous little laugh, "You didn't care for me, then, until I was three years old?"

Chu Sing gazed at the girl curiously a moment.

Instead of answering her, he remarked ruminatively: "Your hair was the colour of honey then. Now it is like a raven's wing."

"No, not really, Chu Sing. You know this black hair is only a cap the gods would have me wear. Under it is hair that won't even lie flat—I used to compare it to my rebellious spirit. It's a queer shade, too—if it did not sound too absurd I'd say it was golden."

"So, you see, you do not altogether belong to China."

Tu Hee rose. A steeliness banished the friendliness from her eyes. Her voice was cold as she rebuked him.

"I am the niece of Weng Toy, Chu Sing."

She turned away as if about to leave him, but Chu Sing caught her and swung her into his arms.

"I apologize, my queen. No, don't struggle. I was but bantering. We are both Chinese, thank heaven, but our foreign training can dispense with Oriental etiquette. Just one kiss, little Tu Hee. You have been eluding me so long I'm growing impatient."

Tu Hee ceased struggling and accepted Chu Sing's caresses passively and lifelessly.

“Can’t I awaken you? Isn’t there one spark of feeling for me under that icy mask?”

Tu Hee’s hand went to her head. “You forget I have been ill, Chu Sing. I’m tired; let us go in.”

“You are confining yourself too closely, dear. Your guardian cared too much for you to want you to injure your health in mourning for him. He knows your love is faithful; he requires no outward manifestation.”

“Perhaps not; but please, Chu Sing, let me have my way for two weeks.”

“Two weeks, ah!” A smile brightened the man’s dark face. “Then my heaven commences. The Gift of the Gods will be mine!”

Tu Hee shuddered at the triumph in his voice.

“Let us go back, please.”

“You won’t visit the sacred temple to-day, then?”

“No, to-morrow will do.”

“There should be two sacred rubies in that temple instead of one. Yes, it is a crime against China and the house of Weng Toy to let that stone remain in the hands of foreigners.”

“But what does it matter?” There was an uninterested, weary note in Tu Hee’s voice. “They, after all, were the people he loved best. Why shouldn’t they have the gift that was conferred on him? Poor Mrs. Culver! The shock of Paul’s death nearly killed her. She must have loved him very much.”

"Bah!" sneered Chu Sing. "These people of Christian faith are weak, watery-blooded imitations of humanity."

"Maybe, but still they have hearts, and Mrs. Culver's own child died so tragically, too."

"What do *you* know about it?" An anxious note had crept into the man's voice.

"I heard the story from Mrs. Claymore, and then I questioned Lun, but she didn't appear to know very much about it."

"They deserved all they got. People like that have no business interfering in the affairs of another race. Let them keep to their own fire-sides and harm won't come to them."

"You seem very bitter against them, Chu Sing. One would almost think they had done you a personal injury."

Chu Sing turned hard, glittering eyes on her, which softened as they met her surprised blue ones.

"Not me. If anything, they have brought me happiness."

"You talk in conundrums. But here's the door. Will you come in or—"

"Would you like me to?" The man's voice was almost pleading.

"I am really very tired, Chu Sing. Would you mind if I asked you to excuse me for to-day?"

Tu Hee laid her hand on his arm as she spoke. "You see," she added wistfully, "our ten-day

wedding ceremony begins very soon now, and I'm a busy girl."

"And then you'll be mine, and I'll carry you away to the hills and have you forever. Farewell, dearest, for a day then."

Tu Hee stumbled as she entered the hall, and would have fallen but for Lun, who caught her and half carried her to a couch.

"Oh, my dear, you'll marry him if it kills you."

Tu Hee lay with closed eyes while her old nurse chafed her hands and sent a boy for a glass of milk.

"You are an old goose, Lun," smiled Tu Hee a few minutes later as she handed back the empty glass.

"But he no for you, Misse Tu Hee. He black and you white."

"Lun, you forget yourself. Remember, when you speak of Mr. Chu Sing you are speaking of my future husband. Besides, your remark is ridiculous—he is as white as I am—every bit."

Lun saw her hasty slip had been misinterpreted and heaved a sigh of relief.

"And now please send for the sewing woman. I'll be ready to try on my wedding dress in half an hour."

Tu Hee slowly mounted the stairs, while Lun hobbled away to do her mistress' bidding. Her hands were tearing at each other frantically,

however, and her lips formed the almost inaudible words: "Two weeks—the Goddess of Mercy make it four! Two moons, he say—what am I to do? And no can I tell."

CHAPTER XIX

AUTUMN'S breath was fast fanning away the torrid heat of summer, but so far it had not mellowed the gorgeous beauty of flowers and shrubs. Nature was running wild in a riot of colours. Hearts might break, tragedy stalk abroad gaunt and ruthless, but the seasons rolled by rythmically and unaffected.

The Culvers had given up the idea of spending the winter in Peking. The first of October was the day set for their return to America, their final farewell to China, the land where they had met their greatest joy and their greatest sorrows.

Irma Culver wondered how God could let one-half the world smile so unfeelingly while the other half moaned and writhed in agony. As she sat with folded hands in her sun-drenched and fragrant garden, trying for her husband's sake to coax back strength to her rebellious body, she tried to piece her life together into some kind of a reasonable pattern, but it seemed as if the more she tried the more like an impossible puzzle it became.

Her religion told her God's ways were not man's ways, but surely, she reasoned, God did not take delight in dealing death darts to people's

hopes ! Perhaps Emerson's policy was wisest: expecting nothing, and being thankful for moderate good.

And then slowly but surely a revolution took place in Irma Culver's soul. Her simple, single faith in Providence enlarged. She saw the world as a great scaffold, where each joist did its share in keeping up the whole. No single part was needlessly strengthened or cared for. The Architect kept His eye on the whole.

That was the self answer to Irma's fretful questions.

She looked askance at her new belief. What could she cling to now? Her intellect had searched, had culled facts until they stood stiff and straight and undeniable, but, alas, comfortless; and Irma's heart called for comfort.

A missionary called and again she received the assurance it was the testing time. God was trying her.

"But why," she enquired, "should God lead me to a pit of black despair? No, no; that may be your idea of God, but my mind can't conceive such a petty deity as that. My idea is that God has to disregard the individual in His great scheme of things. We are necessary sacrifices that the whole may some day be perfect."

"Ah, no, my sister." The missionary's face lit up with the light of personal faith. "God tells us that not a sparrow falls but what He knows; that if one lamb strays from the fold He watches

over it until it returns; that the very hairs of our heads are numbered."

"Yes, yes!" Irma's voice was coolly impatient. "I once had that faith, too. I would like to have it again. It is comforting, but I'm afraid it is shattered for all time. Don't, please, misunderstand me. I'm not railing at Providence. I'm only cognizant of the fact that I'm but a grain of sand in the great Architect's hands — a grain of mere dust, whose position in life would be shifted if it interfered with the perfecting of the vast structure."

Neil Culver did not turn to religion for solace, as his wife. He had moulded a philosophy of his own out of life, and on this he fell back when the second tragic blow fell. But in spite of his continual assurance to himself that law and order ruled the universe and that his place was here for some ultimate purpose, his shoulders lost their old rigorous uprightness and his eyes had a tired look.

They brightened, however, when Paul's name was on his lips. His head lifted proudly and there was a ring in his voice that could not be mistaken. "Paul dead in his youth?" He smiled tolerantly at the sympathizer. "My son has lived a thousand lives every hour over there. Life is not counted in years. He has accomplished more in his short life than I have or ever can, even if I pass twenty milestones beyond the three score and ten. Paul died for his

brother men. Paul's death has brought the world nearer to eternal light. My plan for him was that he should be the evangel of China, but I never dreamed he would die the glorious death of a martyr for the whole world."

Irma heard him one day, and her hold on religion and life ebbed slowly back. That night her husband came upon her with Paul's photograph in her hands, to which she was talking softly and reverently:

"You gave up everything: your happy, joyous youth, this beautiful world; and how you loved it, the spring, summer, and winter of it! You gave up me. You died to make the world better, dear; and I must not mar your sacrifice by blotting it with my tears."

Neil closed the door softly and stole out into the night. He lifted his face to the starry heavens. The breeze swayed the temple bells into soft music, which mingled with a strong man's sob sent up to his God.

CHAPTER XX

“THE God of Sport will banish us if we keep this up.”

“I agree with you,” laughed Helen Claymore, rather mirthlessly. “It’s something for our minds we need.”

“I don’t know about that,” retorted Grace, tossing her racket and balls into the locker. “A woodcutter, should be my vocation to-day. I’m in a mood to demolish everything in sight. Ye gods! To think that that girl’s wedding is only two days away and David across the sea blissfully unconscious!”

“Don’t be an idiot,” snapped Helen. “Come up to the house and I’ll order a couple of ponies ready.”

“Wouldn’t dare. I’d either break the poor beast’s neck or my own.”

“My dear Grace, you must let Fate give you a few biffs. You may as well grin and bear it, for he will anyway.”

“But oh, Helen, isn’t it fire and brimstone! No, don’t be alarmed. That’s the limit I allow myself, but it’s not even the vapour of my steam to-day. I’m in a peevish mood, my friend. You had better keep an eye and clutch on me, for I’m

liable to commit any satanic evil—even the kidnapping of the mandarin's niece. By the way, what kind of a wedding is she going to have? One of those heathenish affairs, where they parade their household linens and wares all over the city?"

Helen nodded. "It will take ten days to complete the ceremony. Visiting guests by the hundred, furniture parade, etc. I think the big procession will be eliminated on account of the mandarin's death."

"Cæsar and Cleopatra! It sounds like the Indian tales of our great-grandmothers' time."

"It's just about as barbaric. Hey ho, here comes Li. Sent him to the city this morning. He's evidently bristling with news of some sort, the way he's sprinting up the path."

"Well, Li, the city isn't burned down; no uprising of the white race or anything like that?" bantered Helen.

"No, madam—much greater, much greater!" panted the boy.

"St. Peter help us!" Helen put up her hands in mock despair. "Come now, Li, keep your imagination steady, boy. Out with the news. They say women sometimes die of curiosity, you know, and it would be reckless of you to kill two white women in their youth."

"Killee—that it. Much killee—Misse Weng Toy."

"Good heavens!" Grace sprang to her feet.

“Speak up, boy.” Helen’s voice was sharp with fright.

“Misse Weng Toy not be married ever now.”

“Don’t dribble; tell us everything at once.”

“I tell—yes, I tell—give me time.”

“Who is dead? For mercy’s sake tell us who is dead.” Grace’s voice was hysterical.

Li drew himself to his full height and in an important voice announced, “The great Mr. Chu Sing he dead.”

“Thank heaven!” Grace sank weakly back into her chair, while the shocked Li stood staring at her open-mouthed.

“Do go on and be quick.”

His mistress’ peremptory command brought the boy to his senses.

“Mr. Chu Sing killee—killee by Miss Weng Toy, and great sacred ruby of Culver stolen.”

Helen stared at the narrator, speechless.

Well satisfied with the effect of his words, the boy turned to spread the joy-giving thrills among the servants.

“Here, come back,” called his mistress.

Li reluctantly halted.

“Have two ponies saddled at once.”

“Yes, madam,” and forgetting his bow, Li fled toward the servants’ quarters.

There was grim silence between the two girls as they set off for the Culvers.

When half way there Grace voiced a thought that had evidently been weighing on her mind.

“If what your boy says is correct about Tu Hee, we must do everything in our power to free her.”

“I can’t believe she did it, a refined, delicate girl like Tu Hee—no, it’s too ugly, too utterly melodramatic to be in the girl’s category. Li has evidently jumbled facts. These people are artists with their imagination.”

Grace wasn’t convinced, however. “Still, you can’t be too sure,” she rejoined. “We don’t know all that’s been between them. She may have grown desperate, poor child.”

“Well, we won’t be in doubt long. The Culvers will certainly know everything that is to be known, as it’s their property that’s been stolen.”

As they neared the Culvers’ temple, knots of chattering, excited peasants dotted the paths. The two foreign women were the targets of many curious stares, as well as many extremely personal comments.

“What makes them so white?” was the audible query of one.

The answer came readily in a “know all” tone: “Foreign devils wash every day.”

But neither Grace nor Helen found any diversion in remarks that another time would have occasioned amused smiles and sallies. They both felt they were in the shadow of grim tragedy.

“There’s Mr. Reynolds,” remarked Grace. “It looks as though he had just arrived from the city.”

As they rode up, Reynolds turned from giving his horse into the hands of a servant. His grave face brightened perceptibly as he caught sight of the visitors.

Grace and Helen were off their ponies before he could assist either of them.

"Thank goodness, we have caught you in, Mr. Reynolds," exclaimed Grace. "We are nearly frantic. Please tell us the rights of the awful rumor we have heard."

"I am sorry to say the rights of it are very terrible, Miss Grace. The sacred jewel has been stolen by either Chu Sing or Miss Weng Toy, or both. Chu Sing is dead, and the Chinese girl is charged with the murder. Come over to the other side of the garden, where we are less likely to be disturbed, and I'll tell you as much as I know."

White-faced, the two girls followed to a secluded bench among some shrubbery. There they heard the lurid facts.

"The theft was carried out very cleverly. Not a soul in the house heard a sound. In fact, the ruby wasn't even missed until ten o'clock this morning, when Neil went into the room and noticed the window was open. Even this fact would not have aroused his suspicions had not leaves and sand been scattered on the carpet. This surprised him, as the room is never used, not even the servants being allowed in to dust it. A faint uneasiness sent him to assure himself of the

ruby's safety, and to his consternation he found the case empty—the ruby was gone. We lost no time in reporting the matter to Prince Tsoo, as Neil didn't care about taking public steps without the Prince's knowledge. And then came the astounding news that the ruby had been found in the late mandarin's house, together with the fact of Chu Sing's murder."

"Does Tu Hee plead guilty to the crime?"

Grace's voice was weak.

"No, she does not; but the authorities say they have a clear case against her. One of the servants blurted out that he had found her in the room standing beside Chu Sing, with a dagger in her hand, the dagger that inflicted his death wound, while Chu Sing's hand still tightly grasped the ruby. The evidence looks pretty black. What makes it worse, the fellow, after discovering that he had incriminated his mistress, denied his statement."

"And Tu Hee, what does she say?"

Reynolds paused before replying to Helen's question. His eyes looked gravely into hers a moment. "By the way, the Chinese girl was a sort of protege of yours, was she not, Mrs. Claymore?"

Helen nodded.

"Too bad, too bad. She doesn't say much of anything. Seems rather dazed. One fact she sticks to and that is that the servant did find her

with the dagger in her hand, but she affirms she picked it from the floor."

"It's too terrible." Helen shuddered. "Poor child! Please, Mr. Reynolds, do all you can for her. I know she is innocent. Tu Hee's word was always gold. Please put the very best detectives in China on the case. She has no man now to look after her interests, and I'm afraid her money won't help very much."

"I'll do what I can," assured Reynolds, clasping the hand Helen extended. "But you won't go before seeing Mrs. Culver?"

"No, we shan't wait to-day. I'm sure Mrs. Culver is in need of rest after so much excitement. Grace is returning to the city, and I shall go on down with her and see what I can do for Tu Hee. You haven't met her, Mr. Reynolds; if you had you might understand our consternation over this. To think of a breath of suspicion attaching itself to her, that pure, lovely child!"

The peasants were still clustered about as Grace and Helen picked their way down the mountain. It was evident they were enjoying this morsel of tragedy as much as a country fair.

"Well, thank goodness, Mr. Reynolds will do what he can for Tu Hee."

Grace turned in her saddle and eyed her companion quizzically. "Prejudice and pleasing a woman can have a pretty stiff tussle. I wonder which will come out on top."

“What in the world are you talking about, Grace?”

“Well, in plain English, my dear, it amounts to this—Mr. Reynolds’ high esteem for you stands in the way of his sense of justice.”

“What nonsense you are talking, Grace!” A rosy glow mantled Helen’s cheeks as she spoke.

“Nonsense or not, I’m going to enlist the services of Rowe, and if he merely insists on acting on his love for me, I’ll send for David.”

But Helen calmly ignored the irony of this remark. She told herself the excitement had slightly frayed Grace’s nerves.

As Helen Claymore approached the big gates of Tu Hee’s home, she expected to be accosted by at least a dozen Chinese officials, but to her surprise the huge barricades swung open and she was admitted as a matter of course.

Before they clanged to, swift runners, bearing a mountain chair, sped past her up to the palace entrance.

Helen, a little annoyed, was undecided whether to turn back or go forward, as visitors had not been in her reckoning. It was a private chat with Tu Hee she had come for, if it was at all possible.

As a boy came up smiling and bowing to take her pony, she slowly dismounted, keeping a frowning outlook on the chair ahead. She saw a slim woman in deep mourning alight, but instead of proceeding, the visitor turned and faced her.

Helen's face lit up with pleasure and surprise as she hurried forward.

"Why, Mrs. Culver! I had no idea I'd meet you here."

Irma Culver returned the younger woman's handclasp warmly. The impassive-faced servants had stepped back, and there was comparative privacy for a moment.

"I felt I had to come, Helen," explained Irma in a quick, low voice. "You and Grace have aroused my interest in this girl and—well, the fact is, while I preach non-interference, my heart usually wins over my head in the end."

Helen beamed on her friend. "It is perfectly dear of you to have come, Mrs. Culver, especially after last night's harrowing experience, and I'm sure you won't regret it. Tu Hee could no more have committed that crime than a baby. We will have you on our side as soon as you see her."

The two women waited in the reception hall while a servant took Helen's card, on which she had scribbled a few words explaining that she had taken the liberty of bringing a friend with her. In a very few minutes the boy reappeared and said his mistress would be pleased to see the ladies in her private sitting-room.

It was the first time Helen had been privileged to enter the upper part of the house, and her love for the antique and beautiful was for once fully gratified. Even Irma, who had had the good fortune to enjoy the hospitality of many of China's

exclusive families, was struck with wonder at the magnificence displayed. It outrivalled anything she had hitherto come across. The soft, thick Oriental carpetings added a modern, luxurious touch to the wide areas, with their superb carvings and exquisite panellings. Flowering trees and banks of ferns and palms, among which flashed golden cages where larks trilled ecstatically, gave lightness and charm to the Eastern splendour of it all.

The servant glided aside to a door on the left and the visitors entered a boudoir fit for a fairy princess.

The girl who rose from a couch at the far side of the apartment blended with and magnified the enchantment. For a moment Helen wondered if she had slipped back into the mystic realm of childhood—surely such beauty wasn't humanly possible; while Irma stood transfixed.

Helen was brought back to reality by the soft-voiced welcome of her hostess.

"Dear Tu Hee," she murmured, taking the slim hand of the girl, "this is Mrs. Culver, about whom you have heard me often speak."

At the name a startled look crept into Tu Hee's eyes and her clasp on Helen's hand tightened.

Irma's manner did not tend to lessen the alarm of the girl; she had not taken her eyes from the face of Tu Hee since entering the room.

Helen was puzzled, disconcerted, at the change that had suddenly swept over her friend. Irma's

face was deathly white, while her hands were clenched tightly at her side.

Tu Hee shrank farther away. Turning to Helen, she exclaimed piteously: "She, too, thinks me guilty."

The girl's remark aroused Irma, and with an effort of the will she clutched back her self-control. Stepping forward, she caught Tu Hee's hand.

"My dear, forgive me for my seeming rudeness. I'm afraid you wouldn't understand me if I tried to explain. Indeed, I can hardly fathom or understand myself the feeling that suddenly rushed over me as I looked into your face. You stir memories—memories that almost engulf me!"

As Irma spoke, her hand went to her head in a dazed sort of way.

Tu Hee's timidity fled. The foreigner's perturbed manner denoted she was suffering, and impulsively the girl drew forward a chair and tenderly assisted Irma into it.

Helen looked on in amazement. What in the world had occasioned Mrs. Culver's strange actions? Tu Hee, to be sure, was very lovely, but the sight of beauty does not usually upset one like that. It must be the reaction. Poor woman, it was a wonder she had not broken down before this, considering all the sorrow she had passed through.

Irma was soon herself again, however, and

heartily ashamed of the concern she had aroused; but whenever she looked at the face of the Chinese girl a mist, a film as it were, seemed to form, which she in vain strove to tear away and peer beyond.

As Helen and Tu Hee talked, Irma studied surreptitiously the slim form in its simple mourning gown of pure white. Never before had a stranger affected her like this girl. Her heart went out to her in great waves of maternal sympathy. Was it the lovely fragility and youth of her that had aroused her compassion? Her heart ached strangely as she noted the deep shadows under the blue eyes, eyes that appeared almost too large for the small, pale face.

The dainty, arched eyebrows showed in startling relief against the blue-veined brow, the whiteness and clearness of which caused Irma to wonder. If the thought wasn't ridiculous, she would have said the girl's face had been stained and the dye was wearing off.

But it wasn't only Irma who was surprised. Helen was taken aback, amazed at Tu Hee's appearance. Whatever the cause, the girl looked less like a Chinese than ever before. Perhaps the lack of rouge and the natural sweet curves of the unpainted lips helped in the startling change. Truly the girl before them, in spite of the ravages of illness and sorrow, was more amazingly beautiful than she had even thought.

And then Helen's eyes dropped to the soft

hand clasping her own and received a setback to her musings. The barbaric gold nail-shield gleamed up at her mockingly.

“It is so good of you to have come, Mrs. Claymore, and your friend, Mrs. Culver.”

“I hesitated somewhat at intruding, dear,” replied Helen, “but my scruples evaporated in my interest and longing to see you.”

“And the continued praises I heard sung on your behalf made me your friend without seeing you,” added Irma, with a smile.

“Please don’t say too kind things. I’m not quite myself yet and I might”—Tu Hee gave a little broken laugh—“well, I might make a silly of myself.”

“You’re a marvelous girl, Tu Hee.”

Tu Hee’s lips trembled.

“I’m afraid not very, Mrs. Claymore. I know I’m a very miserable one. The gods have indeed forsaken me, and now, O Mrs. Claymore”—a wild sob broke from the distracted girl—“they think I killed him!”

Irma made a motion forward, but Helen already had her arms around Tu Hee. “Hush, dear,” she soothed as she pillowed the girl’s head on her shoulder.

Poor Tu Hee, a woman’s sympathy had been denied her so long that the friendship of these two foreigners was heavenly balm to her.

“It’s so nice to have you here.” Tu Hee dried her eyes as she spoke. “I feel better already.”

It was true; the hunted look in the blue eyes had almost vanished.

"I want to tell you and your friend all about it," continued Tu Hee.

"Can't that wait, dear?"

Tu Hee shook her head. "Don't think I'm afraid to meet my fate. I'm not, and I feel it rushing on me very fast. Detectives and spies are posted all around me. Everyone in my household but Lun and the boy servant, who in trying to save me only involved me deeper, believes I may be guilty.

"To think at this time yesterday he was with me!" Tu Hee paused as if reinforcing her self-control. "Yes, he spent nearly the whole day here and left about eight o'clock, saying he had some matters to look after in the city. He departed in the very best of spirits, very much elated that our wedding day was so near."

Tu Hee's voice faltered, and as she saw the blue eyes fill with tears Helen wondered if the girl had real affection for the man after all. Her doubts were dispelled, however, when Tu Hee turned to her wistfully. "He loved me very much, Mrs. Claymore. He has been very kind to me since my uncle's death.

"At ten o'clock I was preparing for bed when a servant brought word that Chu Sing was in the drawing-room. Hastily slipping on a dressing-gown, I went down. I'm sure not more than ten minutes could have elapsed from the time I re-

ceived the message to the time I entered the drawing-room door."

"And where was Lun at that time?"

"Lun?" Tu Hee looked at her friend in surprise. "Let me see. Ah, I remember now. Lun was away in another part of the house sorting out some fresh mourning robes for me."

"I see; well, go on, dear." But an ugly thought had crept into Helen Claymore's mind. The old nurse's frantic efforts to postpone the wedding were vividly recalled. Could it be possible that the woman had taken this terrible means of achieving her object?

"Yes, I remember I was a trifle upset. I knew something out of the ordinary had happened to bring Chu Sing back at that hour, so I hurried down, not even waiting to coil up my hair, but merely covered it with a lace cap."

Tu Hee paused again and covered her eyes for a moment. Helen pressed her hand reassuringly.

"Oh, it's so horrible. I shall always see him as he looked when I came upon him. There he sat in a big chair, his back to the door, his arms resting on a small table, and the ruby clasped tightly between his fingers.

"I don't know how I did it. I realized something terrible had happened. He had a light grey overcoat on, and it was torn and blood-stained under the shoulder. The shock must have numbed even my feeling of horror, for I deliberately walked over to him. A dagger, one of my uncle's,

lay on the floor—it—it was covered with blood. I don't know yet how I could have done it, but I picked it up, and then the door opened and a servant looked in. That is all I remember, but they say *I* did it!"

All this time Irma Culver had sat a silent listener, her slim body bent slightly forward, her eyes fixed intently on Tu Hee's face. Several times, when emotion had threatened to overcome the narrator, she had started up as if to comfort her but had restrained the impulse immediately.

Following Tu Hee's story, absolute silence reigned in the room for several minutes.

Not for a moment did either Irma or Helen doubt the truth of Tu Hee's statement. If the girl had had no genuine love for the man she was to have married, it was plain she had at least entertained a friendly liking for him. Her whole manner proclaimed it. But would strangers be so credulous in face of the black evidence? wondered Irma. Already she was incriminated by her own story, and the servant had put on the black, tragic finish. Irma didn't know much about Chinese law, but she had vivid recollections of the country's horrible punishments, and she shuddered at the thought of this gentle, cultured girl facing a wild, reckless, unreasoning mob.

Over the light lunch that Tu Hee had served in her sitting-room, Helen tried to divert the girl's mind from the gruesome subject that submerged them all. She did succeed in bringing fleeting

smiles to Tu Hee's face. Once she had the temerity to mention David's name, and the quick light in the Chinese girl's eyes did not escape her.

But time was short, and Helen felt they were wasting precious moments in loitering over tea when the girl's life was in hourly danger. She had no definite plan on which to act, but act she must and quickly.

"Much as I would like to spend the afternoon with you, dear, it is more to your interest that I hurry away and set the wheels in motion on your behalf."

As Irma took Tu Hee's hand at parting, again baffling, flickering memories tantalized her. Was it mere pity, she wondered, that almost impelled her to take the girl in her arms and comfort her?

As for Helen, in spite of her bright assurances to Tu Hee as they left her standing in the door of her apartment, heavy doubts assailed her, and she could see no ray of light piercing the dark clouds that surrounded the accused girl.

As the two women followed the servant down the long corridor they came face to face with Lun. The old nurse's hands were clutching at each other nervously, and her eyes shifted from the look Helen bent on her, while the sight of Irma plunged her into the wildest confusion.

"I'll wager she knows more than she has told about this affair," inwardly commented Helen; "and I would have staked my life on that old

woman's fidelity. They're a queer race, these people."

To Helen's eager questions before they parted in the palace courtyard, Irma answered vaguely and absent-mindedly.

"You are surely not disappointed in her, Mrs. Culver?" exclaimed Helen, disturbed and hurt at what she took for the older woman's disinterestedness. "Somehow I was counting on you to champion our cause."

Irma turned puzzled, surprised eyes on the questioner. "Disappointed? Why, my dear, I was amazed, overwhelmed at the child's loveliness. It has dazed me a bit, that is all. Please come up to the temple to-morrow, Helen, and we will talk it all over."

Tu Hee's face haunted Irma Culver all the way home, and the desire became stronger to capture and separate the memories that flashed by, one golden mass; their passing was like the darting of a bird: before her mind could mould them into definite form they were gone.

Weary and puzzled, she slipped into the soft mauve silk negligé her Chinese maid had laid out for her. Dismissing the girl, she herself unloosened the still heavy masses of hair, whose former golden radiance had given place to soft silver.

Despite the silvery waves, however, the years had been very kind to Irma Culver. Sorrow to be sure had long ago stolen away the glow of youth, but had replaced it with something more tangible,

a resignation that lent calmness to the blue eyes and a softer, deeper beauty to the face.

With the brush poised in her hand, her eyes were suddenly caught and held by the reflection in the mirror. She bent closer—the mist was parting!

Crossing to the little table near the window, she picked up a dainty miniature painting and peered at it eagerly. The eyes of the radiant creature smiled back at her happily; the lovely curved lips seemed as if about to part in a flood of joyous laughter. The hair clustered in bright golden waves over the broad, low forehead.

A sharp indrawn breath evinced the fact that Irma Culver was battling with keen emotion. The mists had indeed parted, and with tortured heart she peered in at the memories which, severed from the past, slowly detached themselves and trooped singly before her.

As Irma Culver stared down at her own features she could have screamed with derisive laughter—the face of Tu Hee, the Chinese girl, had recalled and stabbed her with her own golden, buried youth.

CHAPTER XXI

THE funeral of Chu Sing was typically Chinese. He was buried with all the pomp and display his station in life called for. Tu Hee ordered an immense catafalque erected outside her own gates, which obstructed the whole street. There it remained for three days. The customary time is a week or ten days, but circumstances prevented this length of ceremony.

Upon its removal, high dignitaries and friends of Chu Sing—the law unbent far enough to allow Tu Hee also to show respect to the dead—brought all manner of articles, which they arranged and sent up in flames. They thus honored the spirit of the dead man.

Then came the final token of respect, which took place as the funeral passed along the streets, but in which Tu Hee was not permitted to take part. It was the scattering of round pieces of paper with square holes in the centre, resembling copper cash, along the road and to the breeze. This was for the future use of the departed spirit.

Tu Hee felt she was indeed alone now—that the cordon of the law was tightening about her ominously. In vain she protested her innocence.

Some one was guilty. Some one had to pay the penalty, and as no one came forward on whom the crime could be fastened, Tu Hee was the most convenient victim. The penalty itself had not yet taken definite form.

Grace and Helen, with the eager assistance of Irma Culver, worked untiringly to vindicate the Chinese girl. They had also enlisted the services of Neil Culver, Chesterton Reynolds, and Rowen Strathmore, but seemingly to no avail. The Chinese law, figuratively speaking, drew its skirts tightly about itself and let the foreigners see this was a case for its disposal alone.

"It's terrible. They are like heathens — cannibals, gloating over their victim," shuddered Grace.

They were again consulting in the Culvers' temple home.

"We can do nothing more."

Neil Culver flicked the ashes from a half-smoked cigarette as he spoke. "For the tenth time, I repeat, it does not do to interfere with these people. They probably have some strange superstition that the gods will be appeased if they sacrifice this young girl. Ah, here's Chess! He may have some news for us."

"I have, but not very heartening. Ah, Mrs. Claymore, if you will pay me the honor of letting me share your bench, I'll relate what I know."

With a smile Helen readily drew her white skirt aside and Reynolds dropped into the place beside her.

It was late in the afternoon. A torrid heat wave had driven them to the coolest spot in the garden, a pine grove on the edge of the hill, where, if a cool breeze loitered about at all, it was sure to drift.

"A new issue has arisen in the case of Miss Weng Toy."

A wave of expectancy swept from the group and encircled the speaker.

"No," he continued, "it's not what I call hopeful, but it is decidedly less gruesome."

"Yes?" Helen touched his sleeve as she breathed the eager question.

Reynolds' eyes lingered on the white, capable hand. Subconsciously he was telling the woman beside him how in all his restless wanderings he had never met anyone half so marvelous as she. It went on, the subconscious part of him, collecting and registering indelible impressions, while the working-day side of his mind addressed his anxious audience.

"The superstitious fear of the people has them in its grip. It seems the old nurse, Lun, has spread the news that the girl is a gift of the gods, whatever she means by that, and that if she is harmed some terrible calamity will befall China."

Irma Culver had risen, an eager light in her soft eyes.

"Calm yourself, dearest," murmured her husband. "You will remember Lun explained her affection for the child caused her to affix that appellation to it."

"Yes, of course." Irma sank back into the wicker chair.

Reynolds looked questioningly at his host.

"It is nothing, Mr. Reynolds." Irma smiled faintly. "Just memories. They crowded back and overwhelmed me for a moment." Her voice grew softer. "That was the name the natives gave to our little girl, the 'Gift of the Gods.' Please forgive me for interrupting you."

"There is nothing much more to tell about the unfortunate girl, Mrs. Culver. The law demands some form of punishment, so to appease the people they have changed their former sentence of torture to one of life imprisonment."

A startled cry escaped Grace, while Helen covered her face with her hands.

Reynolds looked at the latter anxiously. "Please, Mrs. Claymore, don't take it so hard. It seems like an atrocious sentence for a young girl like Miss Weng Toy, but still circumstances are dead against her."

"It seems horrible indeed," interjected Culver; "but after all it is something for her to have escaped the death penalty. There is always a chance with life imprisonment. Besides, everything points to her guilt. Yes, yes, I know all you

ladies are ready to swear to her innocence, but these people, my dears, are very wily."

"Oh, you don't understand, Dr. Culver!" Helen had risen and was facing them with flushed face and flashing eyes. "I feel Tu Hee is as innocent as myself. Call it woman's intuition if you will, but I know this criminal method of condemning by circumstantial evidence, of which wickedness China alone isn't guilty, is blighting a pure, innocent girl's life."

She flung the words from her ruthlessly, and sped down the path out of sight.

The others looked at each other in amazement, that is, all except Grace, who sat very quiet and white-faced.

Reynolds was the first to break the awkward silence.

"Fine woman," he said, laconically; "thought a lot of the Chinese girl. Too bad, too bad. If you'll excuse me I'll go and see if she wants her pony from the stable."

"Please don't let her go without me, Mr. Reynolds," called Grace.

"You must come back to the house for tea, dear. Come." Irma Culver rose. "It's after four o'clock. No, my dear, I couldn't think of letting you undertake that ride to the city without at least a cup of tea."

So they followed the flower-bordered path back to the house, where over a cup of tea they would presently smile and chat and let convention

straighten the masks that sometimes slip to one side. Ah, the game of life—it has rigorous rules, but if you play up to them you some day come out on top!

CHAPTER XXII

“I DECLARE, Grace, it’s enough to give one the fidgets just to be in the same room with you these days.”

“I’m sorry, mamma, if I disturb you.”

“Disturb!” Mrs. Ashton snorted. “I may have no sentiment, but at least I’ve got nerves. You’ve walked to that table seven times—yes, seven, I took the trouble to count—and picked up David’s photograph. For the love of respectability, I hope you’re not falling in love all over again and with another man at that. If you feel the malady coming on again you had better speak now and not cause a scandal later on. To be sure I’m an American, but I’m also a Baptist, and divorce has never been in my line. Both your father’s side and my own have been noted for their respectable women.”

“O, mother, how can you talk so?”

“There, that’s how she treats a mother’s advice, a parent’s wisdom,” and Mrs. Ashton threw up her hands in despair.

“Why, you know, mother, that David and I are like brother and sister.”

“Well, I thought a lot of my six brothers, but

no one ever caught me mooning over their photographs."

"I—I was just making up my mind."

"Exactly—just what I thought. Well, for Annie's sake make it up quick. I'm too old to enjoy and get thrills out of love tragedies. You'd better speak to Rowe to-night and let him know you're not sure of yourself—that—"

"But I am sure of myself." Grace was almost crying with vexation. "I love Rowe more than any man on earth."

"H'm, well, all I can say is if love affects you the way it has the last few days it isn't healthy for you. No, it is not. Bless my soul, you've been paying more attention to Helen Claymore than to your future husband. Girls didn't act so in my time. No, they did not. Men won't stand for that sort of thing too long. Helen is a nice girl; I'm not saying one word against Helen, mind you, no, I am not; but, mercy's sake, there is no need to go daft over her.

"Bless my soul, is that three striking? and I was to have met Mrs. Playter on the verandah at five minutes to. Mercy, how I detest shopping in heathen countries! They lead you through a dozen rooms—rat holes, rather—and just when you have said good-bye to your friends and your own life you reach the spot where you see something that half suits you; but then what can you expect of people who do everything backwards, even to eating soup last? There, is my hat

straight? By the way, I'll have to get you to raise this ribbon—it cuts my height now. Good-bye. Better go out and get some fresh air.”

With a sigh of relief Grace threw herself on the couch. Her head ached horribly. She didn't wonder at her mother's remarks. Truly she wasn't acting like a happy prospective bride; but the fact was she couldn't enjoy her own happiness and know David was suffering, for suffering he was, beyond a doubt, in spite of the bright sallies and witticisms his letters contained. No, she was too used to David not to be able to read between the lines. The question that troubled her now was, should she cable him to return?

She closed her eyes wearily. Her brain was too tired to help her arrive at any decision just now. The sounds of the street came to her in a rumble which grew to a soothing murmur. Her senses were being lulled into a pleasant drowsiness; she slept.

When at last her mind brought her back to reality she still lay with closed lids. She had had such a pleasant dream. She wondered hazily if it would be possible to coax sleep back and continue it. It was all about David; he had come back and lifted and dispelled all her worries and all his own. It was funny, too, the way he did it. He had just dropped them into a huge sack and tossed them into a valley. How they had laughed over it! She had laughed so much that he had had to hold her to keep her from rolling down after

them. How ridiculous it had all been! There, she was laughing again, and David had hold of her hands and was pulling her back.

"Oh!" She opened her eyes dazedly.

A face was bending over her anxiously, a face that made her eyes fly wide open. She tried to raise a hand to rub them still wider, so she could see if she were really awake, but her hand was held tight.

"Grace, dear, are you ill? You were throwing your hands about so wildly I was afraid you'd hurt yourself."

Grace sat bolt upright now. Her hands went up to the man's face. A radiant smile parted her lips, and with a glad cry she threw herself into David's arms.

* * * * *

It was half an hour later. David sat in the biggest, easiest chair in the room. Grace had thrust him into it; but its large, soft proportions were not being appreciated, for he sat rigidly upright, his lame leg extended stiffly, a frown on his serious face, and a half-smoked cigarette between his fingers.

"What a confounded ass I was to have run off like a frightened school boy!" The words were a sullen, disgusted growl.

Grace, from a low rocker opposite, clasped one knee and eyed her companion wistfully.

"And the beastliest part of it all is," continued David, "that I've put myself out of her

compass altogether. Good God, if she had married that beast I think I should have killed him myself!"

"David!" Grace's voice was a hurt protest.

"Yes, what's the use of talking? Up and doing is the slogan; but I'll have to go about it warily—slowly and cautiously; think of it, when I feel like a roaring lion that has tasted blood!"

"Your work for the Government, David, will it be very heavy, or take up much of your time?"

"No, thank fortune, I can clean it up without any brain effort. Anyone could have handled the bally thing, but on account of my being on the job before, the Chief threw the hint at me and nearly choked on his surprise at my eagerness to skip right back. You see I wasn't strong enough after all, Grace. I made up my mind I'd bury my life in China with her if she'd have me no other way."

"You must be prepared for a change in her, David. I haven't seen her, but Helen says she is no more the child Tu Hee."

David's face grew grimmer. With a jerk he brought himself to his feet, tossed the butt of his cigarette into the ash tray, and stepped to the door.

"Will see you later, Grace. Feel as though I needed a brush down and a rub up, that'll put me in shape for business."

David punctuated his remark with a slam of

the door and proceeded to his own apartment, the same that he had occupied before. The request that he have his old suite of rooms had been courteously granted.

To his surprise the door of his sitting-room was slightly ajar. He hadn't yet engaged a servant. Had his Government duties commenced already?

"Those damn spying Huns!" He muttered. "Rather clumsy work, though."

He pushed the door open wider and stepped in. His luggage had disappeared. Sounds issued from the room adjoining, his bedroom, which signified that the intruder wasn't far away.

Ransacking, eh! Well, they'll have their trouble for nothing.

David tiptoed to his desk, pulled the top drawer out with a click, and his fingers had just closed over the revolver when the door of the bedroom was thrown open with vim.

David wheeled about.

"Well, I'll be—" The grim look on his face had given place to one of comical amazement.

The intruder prostrated himself to the floor.

"Ma Tu, you gave me a start with a vengeance. Get up, boy, and give me your hand."

The abashed, overjoyed Ma Tu sprang to his feet, grins chasing themselves over his brown face.

"But how in the name of magic did you know

"I was back?" questioned David five minutes later, as he viewed with satisfaction the sudden homelike appearance of his rooms.

"Me stay and work right around hotel. Me know master not stay away forever—yu me know."

"Indeed!" David eyed the young sage with amusement. "Well, you knew more than I did, young fellow, but I can just tell you I'm mighty glad to see you, Ma Tu. And now I'm going to leave you for awhile. If Miss Ashton enquires for me, say I'll be back in a couple of hours."

David pulled out his watch. Five o'clock. Was it an unusual hour to present oneself at a Chinese home? he wondered; but even as he asked himself the question he stepped towards the door. Unusual or not, he would go mad if he put off seeing her another day.

David gained admittance to the Weng Toy palace with as little trouble as Irma Culver and Helen Claymore had done. He wasn't invited upstairs, however, but waited in a small sitting-room off the main hall. As he passed the big drawing-room entrance he saw that the door was closed and the heavy curtains drawn.

The room he was shown into was entirely European in its architecture and furnishing. French windows opened on to a smooth, green terrace, where roses nodded fragrantly.

As David stood looking out on the lawns shimmering like soft green velvet, the great gorgeous

beds of Oriental flowers, the fountains around which pigeons circled and dipped, and the miniature lake in the distance, where swans glided about regally in their graceful beauty, he felt again the enchantment of that night weeks ago steal over him—the night on which the mandarin himself had led him through all this loveliness, which he had named the Garden of Peace. But his reverie came abruptly to an end. He had glimpsed a slim figure standing on the embankment of the lake, a form as white-clad and graceful as the swans that clustered around her.

With clumsy fingers David tugged at the fastening of the long window and stepped out into the warm sunshine. His eagerness had scattered diffidence to the winds. It was only when within a few feet of where Tu Hee stood scattering crumbs to her lovely flock that David had scruples as to his hasty action.

A conflict of emotions kept him from proceeding farther. Happiness at being again in the presence of this Princess of the Orient predominated, but it was tinged with pain as he noted the pale, almost ethereal beauty of her who had once radiated such joyous life and youth.

Perhaps it was a twig that snapped under David's foot, or it might have been the intensity of his gaze that caused Tu Hee to glance about uneasily. Her eyes widened at sight of the tall form so near and she drew back startled.

David came forward with extended hand.

“ Please forgive me for my crude manners and thoughtlessness, Miss Tu Hee, but I couldn’t resist joining you when I saw you from the sitting-room window.”

David’s apology gave Tu Hee time to regain her composure.

A faint flush mantled her cheeks, and David wondered if it were mere fancy that told him her eyes looked brighter and kindlier. She put out her hand with a friendly, welcoming gesture. As David took it he knew he was not looking into the face of the Chinese maiden that had won his heart. That impulsive, light-hearted child had fled; a woman bade him welcome now, a woman whom he knew he loved more wildly than he thought it possible for a man to love.

How he longed to take her hands and tell her he would lift her from the dark, tragic pit into which Fate had hurled her! How he yearned, with his love and assurance, to banish that hunted look from the big eyes, eyes which underlying shadows had turned from happy smiling blue into deep misty violet!

For the first few minutes David felt he wasn’t making much headway. Tu Hee kept a tight, constrained hold on herself, which she seemed afraid to loosen.

And why was she afraid? David’s heart leaped as he asked himself the question. He put the old tight rein on, however; he mustn’t frighten away her friendship by any insane abruptness. Even

that was the most precious thing in his life. Strategically he manoeuvred, therefore, and was at last rewarded by Tu Hee broaching the subject that engrossed both their minds. Tactfully he led her on and heard from her lips the tragic story, learned of the horrible haunting fears that were sapping her life away.

“It’s the disgrace of it all, Captain Marsden, and the suffering that will come on my uncle’s house. If I am unable to prove my innocence, Prince Tsoo himself may have to suffer. In China, as you know, whole families, sometimes generations, have to undergo punishment for the wrongdoing of one person.”

It was in vain David assured her he would bring the guilty party to justice, that he would live only to prove her innocence.

In his vehemence he had gone farther than he had intended. He realized this when he met Tu Hee’s amazed eyes, heard her surprised question, why he should do that for her, a person of a different race, one whom his countrymen sometimes despised?

The nearness, the ecstasy of being with her again, the sudden joy of living that swept over him, was the only excuse for what followed.

They were seated in the shade of a huge flowering tree, whose great pink bell-shaped blossoms breathed out deep wafts of intoxicating elixir. The blue sky overhead was reflected in the clear water before them; the swans were sailing majes-

tically, calm and indifferent; the shadows were lengthening; a breeze crept up to them and made white ripples in the soft folds of Tu Hee's mourning robe. The gold nail-shields were caught in the sun's rays and flashed warningly, menacingly, but to David they only added to the mysterious charm of the woman beside him. The world once more stood still for him, as it had the night in the sacred temple. Again that inexplicable, incomprehensible feeling swept over him: that he had lived all his years for just this moment.

Tu Hee drew away startled at what she saw in his face, but David had her hands in his.

"You ask me why I do this? Can you ask, Tu Hee? Can you not read your answer in my face, in my voice? Did you not guess that I ran away from—with—my love for you—that it accompanied me all the way across the sea and drove me back to your side?"

David's thoughts were all a jumble by this time. One coherent idea alone lodged firmly, clearly in his mind—he had told her! His heart sang jubilantly. Thank heaven, convention was strangled. He had told her! He laughed with the very ecstasy of the thought.

"Tu Hee, I love you. Come!"

He held out his arms, but Tu Hee, her face as white as her gown, sprang to her feet away from him.

David, a trickle of cold doubt cooling his ardour, rose too, and confronted her.

He had lived with doubts, with fears that his great love might not be returned, but the wild joy of the past moment had obliterated everything but his own great love.

“ You don’t care, then? ” His voice was dull, cold.

Tu Hee clasped and unclasped her hands feverishly. Her blue eyes, which his passion had compelled to meet his own, now glanced away, avoided his.

David stood there inwardly cursing himself. Like a fool he had treated his great love as a game of chance—had staked everything on one throw and had lost. More, he had lost what he had before possessed, her respect.

Tu Hee had turned her back on him now. Mechanically he picked up his hat from the grassy slope. Well, he deserved it. Apparently she did not care to even say good-bye. What was that? David wheeled about.

Tu Hee’s hands covered her face.

It wasn’t fancy then. It was a sob he had heard. In one stride David reached her side.

“ Please forgive me.” His voice was contrite, pleading. “ The wonder of being near you swept my reason away. I should have known better. I am going now. I won’t ask you for your friendship—yet. I’ll earn it.”

Still Tu Hee did not move.

Reluctantly David turned, but before he could move away his arm was caught in the clasp of

fluttering white and gold-cased fingers. Soft lips were pressed against his hand; there was the swishing of silk, and something white darted past him and disappeared in the green of the shrubbery.

* * * *

“ This is a great old world, Ma Tu, isn't it? ”

The time was past midnight. David was leaning back viewing the rings of smoke from his cigar. Ma Tu was laying out his master's night paraphernalia, emitting a joyous chuckle at whatever his idol might say.

“ I happy, too, Master Marsden. You happy? ”

“ Ye gods, happy! Why, Ma Tu, I'm so jolly, madly happy, that I'm delirious, intoxicated.”

“ Toxee — that mean drunk ” — another chuckle — “ master lie — ah, no ” — Ma Tu glanced up in quick consternation — “ speak funny, that is the word — drunk mean wine — liquor — master not that.”

“ You're right, Ma Tu. It's not that. This is a heavenly drunkenness — a drunkenness from an elixir that gives strength to your muscles, clearness to your brain, and vim to your lagging energy. I envy Hercules no longer — I pity him.”

“ Tee hee! ”

“ Here, stop that confounded tittering. Off to bed with you, you scamp. Do you think I'm a baby? Suffering humanity, you'll be rocking me to sleep next if I don't keep an eye on you.”

“ Yu, yu, a minute I go. Master's bed not

punch quite — see I punch pillows — there — good night, sir.”

“ Good night, Ma Tu—you’re worth all the gold of Midas.”

A chuckle and the soft closing of the sitting-room door, and David was alone.

He sat eyeing his bed for half an hour. There was no earthly use of getting into it; he would never sleep. Would he ever be weary enough to sleep again? To think he was at last favored by the gods, he whom ill luck had dogged so long. David glanced down at his hand. His mind played him a queer trick then. Instead of Tu Hee he fancied his aunt was looking at him, favoring him with a spicy harangue on assinine man and his sentiment. A happy laugh was David’s answer to this fanciful tirade, and he laid his face tenderly against the back of his hand.

The clock in his sitting-room sent in its mellow announcement that two a.m. was here.

David stretched in answer and mechanically unfastened his lounging robe.

“ Might as well dream with my head on feathers as up in the clouds,” he murmured, and rolled in between the sheets.

CHAPTER XXIII

DAVID worked desperately to save the woman he loved, but his every effort seemed flung against a wall—a wall of superstition and prejudice. The Chinese officials listened to the foreigner amiably and politely, and after David thought he had at last drilled a ray of pity and reason into their hard heads and crusted hearts, he received a smile, a bow; yes, their manners were flawless, these dark-skinned, bright-eyed Orientals—and the sad assurance that the house of Weng Toy must suffer for the crime.

Sometimes David lost complete control of himself, and then when his diplomacy had fled and his threats were flung right and left, he was still smilingly and politely but unmistakably informed he was a foreigner interfering in China's personal affairs.

He engaged the services of an American lawyer, but alas, the affair wasn't international, and China remained stubbornly supreme.

Indeed, it seemed David's efforts had only brought more trouble on Tu Hee. She was now guarded by a cordon of spies. She could no longer walk in her gardens. One room was allotted to her; there she must stay a prisoner in her own

house. Even David could gain no admittance now.

Fool, he called himself, to have attacked the enemy openly. Why had he not studied the people first? Why had he not returned their polite indifference with smooth diplomacy? The way then would at least have been open for flight, whereas now Tu Hee was as much out of his reach as if she were already behind the prison bars that menaced her; and that last punishment might take place any hour now.

Gloomy and dejected he sat in his rooms one night. It was the end of the second day of his frantic but useless efforts on Tu Hee's behalf.

Ma Tu moved noiselessly about, afraid every moment he would be ejected by his silent, morose master. Ma Tu had not dared to chuckle for the past twenty-four hours. Indeed, he had had no occasion to; his heart was as downcast as his master's. All he could do was wait and watch like a faithful dog. He had spread his master's night clothes out on the bed, had pounded the pillows into downy softness, and then quietly slipped to the mat at the door, where he stretched himself out and waited. Through a crack in the slightly ajar door his bright eyes fastened themselves mournfully on the gloomy brow of his master.

David tossed aside the end of his ninth cigarette and drew another from the case, but he put it back again, jabbed the silver holder into his pocket and jerked himself from his chair. His lame foot was a bit stiffer to-night. He shook it impatiently

and started on a restless pacing up and down the room.

His face grew grimmer and darker; his lips were set in a tight, straight line; his jaw took on a savage, fighting look. Impatiently he drew out his cigarette case, jabbed the tenth cigarette between his lips and threw himself into the chair again.

The clock chimed the quarter hour after midnight. At the same time a quick, sharp knock sounded; the sitting-room door was pushed open and Grace stepped into the room. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes shone with excitement, and she was dressed for the street.

"Thank heaven, you are up. Quick, get your hat, don't sit there gaping, David dear. It's no nightmare. Do just as I say. I'll tell you later what it's all about."

"Is it Tu Hee? Good God, speak, is it?"

David had sprung to his feet and was roughly grasping Grace's arm.

Grace winced and draw back. "Here, Ma Tu, bring your master's coat and hat; be quick!"

Ma Tu, who had been standing at attention from the moment the door opened, lost no time in doing her bidding.

As David took his place beside his cousin in the waiting car, he turned to her questioningly.

"Yes, it's Tu Hee. The messenger brought the word to my apartment first. All I could make out was that someone was dying."

David's face went gray.

"No, no, it's not Tu Hee. A servant. I don't know what it's all about, but we'll soon know."

As they swerved into the street where Tu Hee's house stood they saw another car approaching from the opposite direction. The huge gates swung open and it turned in ahead of them.

"What can it be all about? O David, I feel we're on the brink of something tremendous!"

"Pray God she's safe," came the stifled response.

"Safe. Of course she's safe, and I think somehow this means she is to be safer."

Not waiting for the assistance of David or the driver Grace flung open the door nearest to her and sprang to the pavement.

On the steps of the great house they mingled with Neil and Irma Culver, Chesterton Reynolds, and Helen Claymore. Each group eyed the other askance.

Chesterton Reynolds was the most composed. "Well, here we all are, but if you don't know any more than we do the reason, why, your minds are a blank."

Before another remark could be passed a servant opened the door and ushered them through the big hall into the French sitting-room, where he left them.

The minutes passed, only five, but to the waiting group they seemed that many hours — days to one of them. At the end of the fifth minute David

had made up his mind that suspense was a foolish, unnecessary burden, in other words that he would set forth and find out why he was there. In his impatient pacing he had reached the door, which he was about to open, when someone else anticipated him. The servant re-entered, bowed, and motioned for the visitors to follow him.

Out into the night again the procession passed, through the heavily-scented Oriental courtyard to another building of the compound. Here they were joined by another servant, whose Eastern calm was sadly demoralized. In quick, excited Chinese, he addressed the boy who had ushered the strangers in. Then turning to the bewildered group he said in hurried, broken English:

“She going fast, not much time—hurry, thanks!”

The mystery, the whole queer affair, was too much for David’s overwrought nerves. Flinging himself in front of the others he grasped the Chinese servant by the arm and shouted at him in a choking, rasping voice:

“Who? For God’s sake, boy, speak—who?”

The boy, startled at this rough handling, shrank back, but instinctively obeying the command in the voice of the excited foreigner, replied: “She, Su, she dying.”

David’s head spun with the shock of relief. He let go the boy’s arm. Tu Hee was safe then. So great was the reaction that he wanted to laugh. Instead, however, silently, with the others, he en-

tered a small apartment at the end of the corridor.

It was simply but comfortably furnished, but no one paid any attention to that fact. All eyes were centered on a bed on the far side of the room, where a Chinese woman was lying, whose short, hard breathing punctuated with low moans, proclaimed she was very ill.

David's eyes were not on the sick woman more than a fleeting second, however. His heart gave a great leap as a slight, white-clad form rose from beside the bed and approached the visitors. It was Tu Hee. Her grave bow included them all, and then quietly she withdrew to her place beside the sick woman. But Tu Hee was not the only watcher.

Three Chinese officials now came forward. One of them, evidently the captain of the trio, approached. His English was very fair, and he spoke quickly and purposefully.

"This woman is ill unto death. In order to reach her ancestors and escape further suffering in the world, she one hour ago took a deadly poison. Her spirit will pass in half an hour. She has called for you all to hear her last words. Which are Dr. Culver and his madam?"

Neil indicated his and Irma's identity.

"Ah!" The official eyed them interestedly. "It is you especially and her young mistress, Miss Weng Toy, she has asked for. The others are merely witnesses, as are we. Please step forward,

close to the bed, Dr. Culver and your madam, please. It is most important that you miss not a word of what this woman has to say."

Surprised at this strange request, Neil and Irma stepped quietly to the bedside. The k'ang or bed was not of the modern, Western kind. It was a typically Chinese affair, built of brick, under which a stove was constructed. The only noticeable difference between this piece of furniture and the ordinary bed of China, was its conspicuous cleanliness.

As she looked into the faces of the foreigners, Su's dark eyes lit up with satisfaction. Reaching her hand towards Irma, she said haltingly: "I meant not that I harm you, madam. I did it for my Paul's sake—my little Paul—into my arms his own mother gave him—Master Chu Sing he promise me Paul—that why I leave you."

Here the woman's voice faltered; she struggled for breath and a bluish tint crept over her face.

Quickly Tu Hee lifted a glass of liquid from a small table beside the bed and moistened the woman's lips.

Slightly revived, her eyes sought Tu Hee's face. "*She* not kill Master Chu Sing—I—killee—him. He rob Paul's spirit of sacred ruby—I see all—Paul *my* child—I nurse him little baby—he promise—*yes*"—her voice became a wild protest—"she good—she no go to prison—I tell you all—I killee Master Chu"—

Then the bluish tint became deeper. A dull

glaze crept over and dulled the black eyes. In her effort to say more the woman half raised herself from the pillow, but the great reaper, Death, was too near. In a moment Tu Hee had her arms around her. Tenderly she laid her back on the pillow, but the spirit had fled.

Gently Tu Hee stroked the still hands, while tears ran down her cheeks. "You were very good to me, dear Su. I owe you much."

It was with mingled feelings Neil and Irma Culver had listened to the woman's laboured confession. Her words and name of course had enabled them to readily recognize her as the nurse who had accompanied Paul from his parental home, and who had deserted him and them with the rest of their servants shortly after they had lost their own child. Her remarks, however, and her evident repentance over some fancied wrong puzzled them. The only conclusion they could arrive at was her late regret at leaving her charge the way she had, desertion being almost an unheard of thing in China where a nurse was concerned. Evidently the poor woman wished to rid herself of this long-remembered act of faithlessness before facing her Maker. Of course that was the import of her strange words; there could be no other.

The whole scene, however, stirred old memories and recalled happy bygone days, and altogether so agitated and pained Irma that her husband watched her anxiously. But Irma Culver had been

a pupil in the school of discipline too long not to quickly regain her self-control. It required just another effort of the will, and self was again relegated to the background.

Ever ready to rejoice at another's happiness, Irma's attention turned to Tu Hee. She was shocked and resentful that through the narrowness and bigotry of the Chinese law this lovely child should have been made to suffer so long and so cruelly. As she watched the delicate, sensitive face she again had the overwhelming desire to take her in her arms and comfort her. Her maternal pity did send her to Tu Hee's side, but before she could speak a word of comfort, the voice of the Chinese official sounded through the room.

"In the presence of death we are reticent, but this confession clears Miss Weng Toy of the charge of murder. The house of Weng Toy is unstained in the sight of all China."

Tu Hee rose to her feet. Her bewildered gaze swept the room until it rested on David. He was at her side in an instant. Words failed him, however; all he could do was hold her hands in a tight, reassuring clasp and look his great love into her soul.

It appeared, however, that the unexpected was not yet over. From a dim recess of the room appeared Lun, wiping her eyes and sobbing audibly. Walking through the group she approached her mistress.

“ It now begins last day of two moon. I bearer of sad and great news for you, Missee Tu Hee.”

“ Surely, Lun dear, it can wait,” chided Tu Hee gently.

“ No, not wait, or Lun will die, too — wait not another hour — minute — second.”

The officials, impatient at a servant’s interruption, now stepped forward. Bowing low to Tu Hee and apologizing profusely for an error of the law, they begged to be excused.

Tu Hee gravely acknowledged their sweeping courtesies and a servant held open the door for them to pass out.

Apparently forgetting Lun’s request, Tu Hee turned to her guests.

“ If you will honor me by partaking of my hospitality before you depart, we will return to my apartments.”

A few minutes later as they sat over their tea cups in the sitting-room the strained atmosphere relaxed somewhat and sincere congratulations were poured out on Tu Hee.

Irma Culver vied with David in the attentions she showered on the Chinese girl.

“ She is so wonderfully sweet, Neil,” she whispered to her husband, “ and such a child to have suffered the way she has.”

David, however, was too supremely content to harbor any irritation over his inability to speak any of his great happiness into two dainty ears.

Wonderful visions of the future occupied his mind, a future in which Tu Hee relieved of every cord of bondage would reign supreme.

The strange happenings of the night did not tend towards extended sociability, however, and conversation was lagging lamentably when Irma Culver suggested that they bring their midnight visit to a close.

David was the last to take his leave. As he bent over the little hand extended to him he murmured softly: "May I call tomorrow and say how glad I am for you?"

Tu Hee raised shy eyes to his face, a soft blush covered the waxlike pallor of her cheeks, but before she could reply Fate shot a thunderbolt which shattered and constructed at the same time.

Lun, half hysterical, hobbled into the room.

"You must not let them go, Misse Tu Hee—no—no. Say to them come back."

The departing guests followed with amazed eyes the old nurse as she burst through their midst, a huge teakwood box in her arms, which she deposited on a table near her mistress.

"See," she exclaimed in a shrill voice, "my master say I must no show it for two moon after he go. Two moon now. He say, Misse Tu Hee, that he like keep love of his child till then, but you love him always, Misse Tu Hee—yes?"

Lun's voice was frantic in its appeal.

"Lun, Lun, you are overwrought. Please try and calm yourself."

"No, Missee Tu Hee, Lun not wrought over. See, she open box for you."

Fumbling in her dress, the excited woman pulled out a small gold key attached to a yellow silk cord. Her trembling fingers groped awkwardly as she endeavoured to fit it in the tiny lock of the box.

"We had better go," suggested Irma in a low voice.

The words, quietly spoken as they were, reached Lun. She wheeled about, her arms upraised.

"No, no, Missee Madam—you no go—this for you too."

She limped forward and dropped on her knees before the astonished woman.

"You hate Lun—you maybe want killee her, but no, you too good. You will hate, only hate. But Lun could not help, madam. She did it for sake of little Gift of Gods. And then one day Lun stand it no more—the evil spirit in heart scratch and tear—I know then I wicked woman and I go to your temple—yes, I go to tell all—but madam way to America."

Tears streamed down the old woman's face and she rocked back and forth, moaning.

"Hush, Lun." Irma bent over her. "You did me no wrong, my good Lun. I have always re-

membered you with kindness, for you were faithful always to me and mine."

But instead of comforting, Irma's soothing voice brought forth wild, agonizing sobs.

"You killee me now—I die you say more."

"Lun." Tu Hee laid a hand on her nurse's shoulder. "Please, Lun, try and calm yourself. You are distressing Mrs. Culver. Come, let me take you away."

"No." Lun struggled to her feet. Her sobs ceased and her voice was decisive as she exclaimed: "The voice of the dead must be obeyed."

Curious, half-pitying glances followed the old woman's fumbling efforts to lift the lid of the box she had brought in. She waved away all offers of assistance with the strange words that it was her last duty to the dead.

At last her efforts were rewarded and the lid flew back. Lun peered into the box, a look of awe and reverence intermingled with fear on her wrinkled yellow face. Slowly she drew forth two large bluish-tinted envelopes, which she examined closely. "Yes—this yours, Missee Tu Hee, and this yours—madam. Read here—two moons now."

Irma Culver, wondering and mystified, took the big legal-looking document from the woman's hand.

Curiosity and amazement were rife now among the spectators of this curious tableau. The little

scene they were witnessing suddenly vibrated with human interest, but even they had no idea of the stupendous role they were about to witness.

As Tu Hee looked at the envelope her face went deadly pale. She recognized the writing of her guardian. Tearing away the blue flap, her trembling fingers drew forth a folded oblong parchment. The people surrounding her were forgotten, as eagerly and lovingly her eyes sought the last message of her beloved relative. It was in English, all of it.

“My darling Tu Hee, my Autumn Gladness, for indeed you have been that every moment you have breathed into my life, when you read this you will perhaps turn shudderingly away. Ideals are hard to lose, dear one, but I pray the gods your pity will go out to me and that your love may not recede, for you have loved me, little one, and my one consoling thought is I have not made your young life unhappy. My one great aim in life was to protect you from the shadows, to let you live in the open, broad sunlight, where sin and prejudice should not touch you. With this purpose before me I thrust no religion, no creeds upon your white, young soul. Foreign and Chinese education had equal chances in opening the bud I had snatched to myself.

“Ah, little Tu Hee, the time is come for me to say it. I must not cringe and whine, must not even fear or shrink from the cold horror, the mistrust that may fill your soul. The gods help me.

And may you find it in your heart, Autumn Gladness, to forgive an erring old man, who sinned against your blood and his own soul in his great love for you.

“Are you prepared, dear one? You were suckled and trained into a beautiful blossom in the arms of China, but your birthright is a foreign land. Not a drop of my blood, not a drop of China’s blood, flows in your veins. The gods help me to say it: Tu Hee, my beloved child, yet mine only in love, you are a foreigner by birth, an American—”

But Tu Hee’s blinded eyes saw no more. They saw not even the wondering faces surrounding her. Dazedly her hand went to her head, as if to thrust away the hideous nightmare that clutched her; then with a little moan she staggered and would have fallen had not David caught her.

Tenderly he carried her to a couch, but so startlingly white was the face he looked into that his heart stood still with sudden fear. Before he could voice it, however, Neil Culver pushed him aside and bent over the slight form, from which seemingly the life had fled.

“She’ll be all right presently. Open the windows, please, and bring me towels and water.”

Culver’s voice was cool, authoritative—the voice of the capable physician.

“No, please, don’t crowd around—she needs all the air—why, Irma, dear!” The last words

were addressed to his wife, who had thrown herself beside the couch, laughing and crying.

“ Neil, Neil, look at her — can’t you see? ”

“ See, dear? ”

“ Our baby, our little Tu Hee — O, my God, I thank Thee! ”

A dim light of understanding broke into the room, but dim as it was it showed that the ground was too sacred for even friendship. So we, too, will step aside as the curtain of sympathy and understanding drops to shield a mother’s soul.

CHAPTER XXIV

AUTUMN seemed intent on getting rid of the last remnants of summer in one last prodigal handful of sunshine and fragrance, and out on the sweeping lawns of the Weng Toy gardens a merry group was absorbing it.

Nor was the generous bounty confined to the lawns—the swans' domain had received a goodly portion, as the smooth, clear, sun-flecked waters of the lake signified, and the graceful rulers thereof had been called upon to share up. That they did this in no kindliness of spirit was evinced in the proud, indignant amazement they exhibited as they watched from an exclusive distance the little green boat that glided about without their mistress.

“They look actually vengeful,” laughed Helen Claymore as she tossed pieces of cake to the wary birds. “Aren't they beauties, the darling things?”

“A little too high and mighty for me,” vouchsafed Reynolds. “I like something a little more impulsive—ah—er—a little more American, don't you know?”

“And you an Englishman?”

Helen's eyes were dancing as she made the saucy retort.

"Helen!" Reynolds reached forward, covering her hand with his own. "Helen, why do you tease me so unmercifully? Sometimes I have reached the very pinnacle of hope and then —"

Helen's head was drooping, perhaps to hide something in her eyes, which she was not ready for her companion to see.

Reynolds tried in vain to peer beyond the small, round chin, but the big, wide-brimmed hat was obdurate.

"Well, hang it all—the uncertainty is killing—I'll take a chance." This reckless speech, by the way, was merely mental.

"Helen," the voice was desperate, pleading. "Helen, dearest Helen, am I a conceited ass? The fact is I—"

The moment had arrived. Helen's eyes came into view, such soft, dancing, happy eyes.

"No, Chess, dear, you're —"

But she got no farther.

Time—two minutes later:

"Oh, dearest, *please*," came a smothered voice.

"This pond is ideal to be on, but not *in*."

* * * * *

Yes, truly, there is no spot in the whole world to which the little god Cupid can steal away and rest; the whole globe is his workshop, and he was having a busy time in China right now.

"Poor mother, I don't care about leaving her

too long. Her eyes follow me so wistfully, as if she were afraid I might vanish any moment."

"And so you may, dear."

Tu Hee lifted smiling eyes to David's face, but her voice was softly pleading.

"Ah, David dear, you know I long for that time as much as you, but don't you think I owe my parents at least a year? I feel if I gave them that it would help Uncle Weng's spirit to rest easier."

"Dear little girl, I understand. A year from now, then, we will say."

"David, David, how good the gods have been to me! Yes, I say gods, for I hardly know what I believe now. I thought I should never smile again and I want to laugh always now. No, please don't misunderstand me. I haven't forgotten Uncle Weng, but somehow I feel that he isn't far away, that he can see me and that my being happy makes him happy too."

"Here is the temple; will you come in with me?"

As they made their way past the prostrated guards, Tu Hee slipped her hand into David's and together they approached the great image in the center.

"See, David," whispered Tu Hee.

David glanced up. "Why, there are two rubies now."

Tu Hee nodded. "Yes, father and mother have given Paul's gift back to the house to which it

belonged. It is better so, just as it is better that this great estate should pass out of my hands to the next in line. So you see, dear, I shall take nothing away with me but memories and undying love, for his love will surround me always, as he said it would."

The moment was too sacred for an answer. Silently and reverently David watched Tu Hee as she knelt before the statue and made her offering of incense. He glanced again at the glowing, radiating pools of crimson shining up so brilliantly against the whiteness of the alabaster brow. The jewels no longer scintillated like restless, wandering spirits seeking to right earthly wrongs. Instead, their rays appeared to proclaim an everlasting peace.

As David's eyes lingered on the compassionate, lifelike face of the image, again, as on that other night weeks ago, the temple seemed filled with the presence of the Christ whose love had redeemed the world. The unquestioning faith of childhood overwhelmed him, that time that still glimmered a hallowed light in the far away past, when he had knelt at his mother's knee, a small, white-clad, credulous boy, and impelled by a force that lifted his soul strong and clean above the mundane things of existence, he dropped on his knees beside Tu Hee and with hers his heart went up in a great cry of thanksgiving and praise to the God of all humanity.

CHAPTER XXV

THE wonder of it peeped in anew with the dawn. Irma Culver slipped on her dressing-gown and stole to the casement window. A soaring lark gave forth his ecstasy in full-throated, golden notes; the flowers, drowsy with dew, unclosed sleepily their petals as the sunbeams danced across them; the temple bells added to the magic of a new day by low, mellow music; and the woman gazing on all this pure splendour compared it to a new dawn in her own life.

It was without regret, however, that she turned away from the scene and moved softly to the door in order not to awaken her husband, who slept after a late vigil at a sick bed.

Her step acquired a joyful spring when the corridor was reached, and she sped along the passage like an eager girl about to keep a tryst. Her heart was palpitating, her cheeks were flushed, and her eyes wide when she at last paused and opened a door on her right.

Softly she closed it and stood gazing expectantly across the dainty room. Only for a moment did she hesitate. Like a magnet she was drawn forward to the small white bed. There she caught her breath as she looked down at the girl, whose

soft, regular breathing proclaimed youth's untroubled sleep.

The miracle saturated Irma Culver's soul anew. *Her* daughter—her very own, this radiant, joyous creature—bone of her bone, flesh of her flesh—the babe whom she had mourned for sixteen years given back to her from the grave! Surely God reigned in the heavens and all was well with the world! He had heard her prayers, had watched over and kept untarnished the bud, and had in His own good time returned it to her arms, a blossom pure and unstained as when He took it from her.

How lovely she was! The long, dark lashes lay like silken fringe on the fair skin, which returning health and happiness had delicately flushed. The hair clung in soft, golden curls around the moist, smooth brow. One hand was lying palm up on the pillow, the other curled, small and white, over the lacy counterpane. The nails, pink and shell-like, had discarded the seal of the East—the gold, menacing shields.

Irma could resist the promptings of her great mother love no longer. Impulsively she reached her arms to this wonderful child—hers, her very own. Her starved heart beat in great, suffocating throbs. Her love was almost primitive in its wildness.

Tu Hee stirred. Her hand uncurled and lifted. Irma bent her head and thrilled as the slender fingers brushed her lips.

As her hand fell back Tu Hee's eyes opened. She smiled dreamily into Irma's adoring face, and a sob of joy died in the woman's throat.

"Mother!" Tu Hee raised her arms now, and with a soft, endearing term, resurrected from the dear dead past, Irma clasped her child to her breast.

"You have been with me all through this wonderful night, my darling little mother," murmured Tu Hee, as she stroked her mother's face and hair; "you and father and Uncle Weng, and Uncle Weng was as happy as we. You don't mind my loving him so much, mother dear?"

"No, no, my darling. He has robbed me of sixteen years of mother love, but we can make it up, can we not, Tu Hee mine?"

"Ah, yes; and he suffered all those years, mother. How he suffered! I know, for I loved him so well."

Tu Hee pressed her lips to the hands that clasped her.

"Mother! What a name! How I have longed to say it from a tiny child! I used to pretend and call it to Lun, but, dear old Lun, she couldn't bear it. I understand at last the reason—it pricked, hurt her just as ever-increasing remorse hurt Uncle Weng."

So they talked, mother and child, until the sun burst in full radiance through the open windows and household sounds proclaimed a wonderful new day had begun.

Neil Culver closed his heart to all petitions that day. The sick he turned over to a doctor in a neighbouring hill, who, although a foreigner merely sojourning like himself, readily acceded to his request despatched by the voluble, beaming Yo.

His eyes followed his new-found child with a mixture of awe and incredibility. Somehow his practical nature could not readily grasp this wonderful revolution in his life. It seemed to him that a miracle had indeed been wrought. This lovely, radiant creature his! And then regret lashed him furiously as he recalled his apathy, his repeated warnings against interference. He shuddered as he thought how near she, *his* child, had come to tossing herself into the abyss of despair, forever beyond his reach, as the wife of the Chinaman, Chu Sing. His face blanched as he called to mind how, but for his sudden decision to return, the sea might have remained between them forever.

Bitter, inflexible anger gripped him at the cruel, barbarous wrong that had been perpetrated against him and his. The present flood of ecstasy that engulfed their hearts only caused the hideous crime to appear blacker and larger. He sat, an unforgiving judge, over Weng Toy's written confession:

"I swear by the spirits of my ancestors, madam, my intention was but to regain my own, my sister's child. I saw my opportunity when

plague had called your husband to the interior, but when soon after his departure it crept into your household and laid its mistress low, I believed the gods were playing into my hands. My time had come. Plans were skilfully laid—the Chinese child, Paul, was to be carried from his nursery at midnight by my men. We could not fail. The greatest menace to our plans, Lun, was silenced by threats on the welfare of the Gift of the Gods, your child. So forgive the faithful nurse and attendant of your daughter, for she has ever proved that.

“But madam, our scheme failed, miscarried. When the child was unwrapped before me, I discovered the frightful blunder. In consternation I ordered the immediate return of the white babe, but my servants brought the word it could not be done—your husband had arrived from his long vigil in the plague-stricken district. Lun was cowed into an ally by the belief that the mistake proved the gods desired the little Gift of the Gods for China. A story was quickly concocted and accepted by you and your husband that the child had died with the dreaded fever during your illness.

“I offer no excuse for my conduct, madam, but by the gods I swear it was not my wish then to keep your child. I had no interest in the foreign babe. I merely desired to gain possession of my sister’s child. It was my intention to return your child when the first opportunity offered, which

would not incriminate me and put my nephew beyond my reach forever. And then one day I discovered that your babe's sunny, foreign ways had bound tight cords around my heart. I loved her. I salved my conscience with the thought you had my flesh and blood in your possession. I bribed and coerced your servants to leave you. And then you sailed for your own country and my way was clear.

"I ask not your pardon, madam. The beauty of your child's soul bruises and tortures me every day of my life with the realization of what I have bereft you. My daily prayer is, may the gods give me strength to confess in time. I think they will. On your child's twentieth birthday my guilt will be made known. If the spirits of my ancestors call me before then, this letter is to be handed to you by the faithful Lun two moons after my death.

"May the gods crowd into the remaining years of your and your husband's lives all the blessings you have foregone, and multiply them twice over."

In time, as the sweetness, the beauty of his child's nature saturated his soul he might come to think less harshly of the man who had flung the sinister shroud across his threshold, but who also, recognizing the great responsibility he had snatched to himself, had ever kept jealous vigilance over the purity and innocence of youth. In time this might come to pass. Who can tell?

In the meantime, anger was submerged and tortuous thoughts banished by the exquisite joy which was pouring into the temple home among the hills.

And so passed those wonderful first days for the reunited family. Reunited? Ah, no, for neither Neil Culver nor Irma, nor yet Tu Hee—who had the first day learned by heart, from his babyhood days to his last glorious achievement, the history of Paul, her young hero brother—forgot for a moment a grave in far away France, an emblem of sacrifice of just such joys as was now theirs—love, home, the birth of a new day, the soft hush of a lark-swept twilight—yes, all the dear, familiar things that the world's young dead had loved so well and had given up for their fellow-men.

Ah, the pity of it! And the glory of it, too! And from the Culver home, as from every home where the grim shadow lies, goes up the righteous plea: Forget not, ye who go on your way, that these—the world's glorious youth—died for you. Repay? No, you never can. But at least you may help us to hold high the torch by burying deep in the bowels of the earth lust, hatred, greed—in other words, the love of self.

CHAPTER XXVI

“Now FOR mercy’s sake don’t begin to fuss, Grace. It’s nothing but a bit of dust in my eye — most likely blew in from this open window. Good gracious, the train is due to start in ten minutes and Mr. Reynolds and Helen still wandering at large.”

Mrs. Ashton punctuated her remark with another dab at her eye. In spite of her assurance that it was only dust, she used the piece of linen in her hand rather furtively and blew her nose somewhat vigourously.

“Now, for Annie’s sake, don’t look so suspicious. If there’s one thing I can’t tolerate it’s doubting a person’s word. You’ll be saying next I’m actually weeping. Goodness knows, I wouldn’t blame you if you did — there’s enough sentiment saturating the world for a bit of it to penetrate even me.”

Grace smiled at her mother slyly.

“Bless my soul,” Mrs. Ashton here whipped her handkerchief across her nose impatiently, “to think it’s actually me sitting in a railway carriage in Shanghai. Who would ever have thought the day would come when I would take a two days’ journey to see other people off to

America? Why, I declare that girl, Tu Hee—mercy, what a heathen name!—Irma ought to change it at once—but as I was going to say, she's as much American as you are and all in a few days. It's marvelous."

"But she always was an American, mother."

"Tut, tut—nothing of the kind. She's been actually stewed and dried in heathenism—marvelous, marvelous!—and her hair—even if it has turned from black to yellow—inconceivable!"

"But you see, mother, Tu Hee's hair is naturally fair. Even her skin was stained regularly, but her old nurse used a bleach, which restored it to its natural tint."

"Nurse!" Mrs. Ashton sniffed. "Old kidnapper, you mean; and the idea of Irma employing the creature again—actually taking her with her. Irma's downright soft, there's no getting away from it, but you can't help liking her and overlooking her foolishness. Well, I'm glad she has found a little joy in life at last. She started out happy and it looks as though her last days will be a little less grey, though the loss of Paul was a severe blow. There, now, was a fine boy, the only heathen I ever cared two pence about."

"Drat that sand!" Mrs. Ashton flicked her handkerchief across her eyes. "That window should be closed."

"I'll close it, mother." Grace rose.

“ And have us smother! I should say not. It’s bad enough travelling in heathen lands without risking suffocation. Thank goodness, we have a private car, though.

“ Well, the Culvers are on their way now, and David too, the sly young rascal. Had his eye on that girl all along. Well, thank goodness, she turned out to be white instead of yellow; though between you and me, Grace, I don’t believe it would have made the slightest difference to that young hothead; no, I do not. The Marsdens were always like that—gentlemen, you understand, every inch of them, but headstrong, when their minds were once made up. Mercy, yes. And David’s a chip off the old block. Do you think he would listen to me when I tried to dissuade him from pinning his coat tail to that heathen scamp of his?—what’s the creature’s name? Eh? Ma Two, is it? Well, thank goodness, there’s only one, for if he was a twin David would be sure to hunt up the other and take him along too. All I hope is that he takes my advice and keeps razors and knives out of the barbarian’s reach. Mercy, how can he do it? I’ve at last acquired a taste for olives, but olive skins—Pst!—they’re beyond me. No, I don’t feel safe a minute in this heathen country. No, I do not. I hope Rowe gets another post very soon, for I don’t like to leave you here indefinitely, Grace; but I suppose a poor mother has no longer any say in such

matters. But, as for myself, I've had enough of the wretched hole and if you were safely married I'd be going too."

"Poor mother, it's a shame."

"Tut, tut, child. I can stand a little inconvenience, I guess. Besides, it won't be long before you and Helen lose your identity—two weeks. And then, my dear, I think I'll leave you. The fact is, Grace—yes, I might as well admit it, sentiment's got the best of me at last—the blessed blue hills of Kentucky are tugging at me mighty hard."

The handkerchief was again in evidence.

Grace made no reply. She knew none was needed; sentiment had indeed penetrated the crust of bluff, and her mother, unabashed, was revelling in memories of the sunny South.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE great ocean liner ploughed its onward course toward American shores. On its deck a girl and man were standing; the girl's eyes were fastened wistfully on the dimming outline of China, the man's on the face of the girl.

Yes, it was Tu Hee and David, but not the Chinese maiden. Ah, no — this was a typical American maiden. The only foreign trait that clung and would always be a part of her, that caused many turnings of heads and whispered comments, was the graceful, unhurried movements, the simple, unaffected manner — to sum it all up in one phrase, the charming courtesy of the East.

In her smart sporting costume of white, topped by a soft, coy tam, which did not altogether conceal hair no longer straight, lustreless, and black, but soft, silken, and of that rare shade — well, perhaps David's description is best — sunbeam gold — she looked very lovely. No wonder the man beside her drew deep breaths and marvelled again that this happiness should have fallen to his lot.

As David watched her, he knew he was not even on the edge of her thoughts, but he felt no twinge of jealousy. Yes, Tu Hee was far away

at that moment in the glad, joyous cycle of her childhood and youth, which was closing, even as the outline, on which her eyes were fastened, was fading from view.

“It is no use, I cannot say good-bye.” Her voice was detached, as if it were her own soul she was addressing. “Something tells me he does not wish it, that his love will be mine always.”

“There they are, Neil.”

Irma Culver’s voice had a bright, reawakened ring to it; her step was buoyant as she approached with her husband, and the weary lines almost vanished from the face, which through all the trying years had not lost its spirituality.

When within a few feet of the engrossed pair, Irma paused and laid a hand on her husband’s arm. “See, Neil,” she whispered, “she is watching China fade away. I feel somehow that this is a sacred moment for Tu Hee, that even our love would be an intrusion. Had we not better go the other way?”

Suddenly Tu Hee reached forth her arms and drew them back again to her breast; the gesture was almost caressing. Her lips moved; her voice was but a murmur. “Farewell, dear land, but I am not unhappy, for your memories are locked tight in my heart. David!”

“Yes, dear?” David bent closer; his hands sought hers as he waited for her lips to speak the message he saw in her eyes.

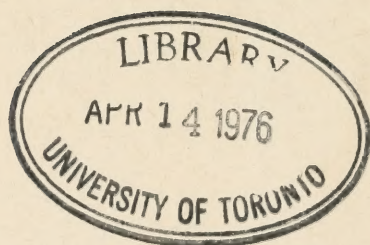
“David, dear, the mantle of the past has

slipped from me—that part of me that has fought for control so long, that has so often worried and puzzled me, now stands dominant—the blood of my fathers and the free spirit of the Western world have conquered.”

Reverently she bowed her head over the hands that were clasping hers, as she softly added: “Henceforth, my beloved, thy people shall be my people and thy God my God.”

And the sky and the sea met in a benediction—China, framed in a girl’s golden youth, had closed from view.





**PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE
CARDS OR SLIPS FROM THIS POCKET**

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO LIBRARY
